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Co-editors' Introduction

Welcome to Business Educator Issue 1 (2020-2021) a Special Edition **'Management Learning and Business Education during Turbulent Times'.**

This Working Paper series is for scholars, researchers, early career researchers, members of the PhD community and students whose research and scholarship are located within Management Learning and Business Education. The purpose of this working paper series is to provide a peer-reviewed approach to support the development of high-quality outputs from research in the areas of:

- **Management Learning** including leadership and management development approaches; coaching; professional development; reflexivity; creativity and innovation in management learning; developing resilient and agile managers; internationalisation of management learning across cultures.
- **Business Education** including business pedagogies; creative approaches to learning and teaching; online and hybrid approaches; digital business education; the student experience; student as partners; collaborative approaches to business education; inclusive business education practices; work-based learning, experiential learning; internationalisation of business education.

We are delighted that this first issue reflects the breadth of the experience within the research community in the Faculty of Business, Law and Tourism and beyond by including working papers from early career researchers, members from the PhD community and established international recognised researchers.

Following the Call for Papers in October 2020, this issue contains six working papers and starts with a timely topic for all on ***'What role do social resources play for minority ethnic graduates in the graduate employment market? A review of a targeted market intervention'*** by Professor Heather McGregor (Visiting Professor to Research Centre for Management Learning and Business Education) co-written with Dr Kane Needham and Thea House. This is followed by a paper from a group of early-career researchers and staff based on their reflections as ***'An academic journey from disruption and discomfort to a digital curriculum by transforming professional disposition'*** by Dr Victoria Rafferty, Dr John Dixon-Dawson, Iris Ren and Karen Wharton. This is followed by a paper that explores the student experience using a metaphorical illustration ***'Defining key factors that influence 'the student experience'*** by Dr Graeme Price. The next two papers are from our PhD community who have presented ideas that will become the focus of their PhD studies. The first of these papers is ***'COVID-19 on aviation: Insights on challenges facing the airlines; managing uncertainty; the potential role of leadership in dealing with a crisis'*** by Mohammad Adwan. The 2nd Paper from our PhD community is ***'Professional identity: Concept and formation'*** by Abbas Alkihdir. The final paper for this issue is a metaphorical reflexive conversation regarding the challenges of the online pivot and a transformation of our approach to learning and teaching between the Co-Editors and members of staff in the Faculty on ***'Letters of praxis: A metaphorical journey through the challenges for business and management education during turbulent times'*** by Dr Paul-Alan Armstrong and Professor Monika Foster.

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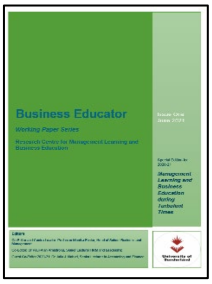

What role do social resources play for minority ethnic graduates in the graduate employment market? A review of a targeted market intervention

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Social capital

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Under-represented Groups

Structural Disadvantage

Minority-ethnic graduates

Abstract

Higher education has traditionally been a route to career entry. In the last three decades, the UK government policy to open up higher education to many more students has almost doubled the proportion of the population with undergraduate degrees. However, this has not kept pace with graduate-level employment, and many graduates find it challenging to access entry-level roles. While structurally disadvantaged graduates may possess an abundance of human capital at the conclusion of their studies, they may not possess adequate amounts of social capital, i.e. connections, which can benefit job acquisition. This paper reviews a training intervention designed to help structurally disadvantaged minority ethnic graduates access careers in one specific business management discipline, corporate communications. The intervention was designed to deliver both discipline-specific human capital and social capital. Through interviews with graduates who were accepted for training, and those that were not, the main themes addressed by the intervention were established: the challenge of the transition from university to employment, the role of connections in supporting that transition, understanding the value of connections and using them to access opportunities. Targeted training interventions may have a role to play in levelling the playing field for disadvantaged graduates and career access.

[1] *Corresponding author. Address for correspondence Professor Heather J. McGregor is the Executive Dean of the Edinburgh Business School, the School of Business of Heriot-Watt* University. H.mcgregor@hw.ac.uk

Introduction

The opening up of UK higher education to greater numbers of students since 1992 was designed to provide equality of opportunity; nonetheless, a degree education in itself seems unlikely to create a level playing field between graduates of all backgrounds in the graduate employment market. A structural disadvantage, however, mitigated, lingers on. Male graduates are more likely than female graduates to have a high or upper-middle skill job (Office for National Statistics, 2017), and black and minority ethnic (BME[2]) graduates are less likely to be employed following graduation from university than non-BME graduates (Zwysen & Longhi, 2016). Graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds consistently earn less upon graduation than peers from more advantaged backgrounds, based upon receipt of free school meals and the POLAR[3] geographical classification of disadvantage (Department of Education, 2019). Intersectionality means that many who have one structural disadvantage may also have others (e.g. many minority ethnic graduates also come from disadvantaged backgrounds). The most recent report by Universities UK in 2016 concluded that ‘Compared to their peers, graduate outcomes are not as good for black and minority ethnic students’ (Social Mobility Advisory Group, Universities UK, 2016).

Social capital – defined as an individual’s access to social resources – is an instrumental part of career progression. Quantity and quality of connections are deficient in the BME population compared to the non-BME peers (Wilson, 1996), in women compared to men (VanTubergen & Volker, 2015) (Forret & Dougherty, 2004), and amongst those from a disadvantaged background compared to a non-disadvantaged background (Moerbeek, et al., 1995).

This paper discusses the results from a study of a number of BME graduates who applied to a training intervention. The results support evidence of structural disadvantage, even amongst a motivated and ambitious cohort of participants. They

[2] Black and Minority Ethnic or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic is the terminology normally used in the UK to describe people of non-white descent (Institute of Race Relations, 2020), thereby being a rather homogenous category, and may therefore obscure the differences between subgroups within this definition.
[3] POLAR is an acronym which stands for Participation of Local Areas, and is a tool derived from the UK’s national census data to identify areas of deprivation

also indicate that the training intervention is addressing the social capital deficit. Finally, they identify the four key themes addressed by the intervention.

Literature Review

Graduate transitions and employability:

Recognition of a mismatch between the skills developed in UK higher education (HE) and the requirements of graduate employment can be dated to the publication of the 1997 Dearing Report (Tomlinson, 2008). Subsequently, the concept of employability received more attention in university curricula planning and empirical study (e.g. (Crebert, et al., 2004); (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006) (Wilton, 2011) (Pereira, et al., 2020). Continued expansion of students studying in HE since 1992 – or 'massification' of HE – has led to growing numbers of graduates entering the employment market (Tomlinson, 2012), and the subsequent, established, concern that there are too many graduates produced for too few graduate jobs (Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004) (Tomlinson, 2008) (Tomlinson & Nghia, 2020)

Employment outcomes for those of black and minority ethnic (BME) background persistently lag behind those of the white British population. While the term 'BME' encompasses a wide spectrum of outcomes, overall graduates are between 5-15% less likely to be in employment than white British individuals following graduation from university (Zwysen & Longhi, 2016). BME individuals with A-levels are more likely to be overqualified for their job (Brynin & Longhi, 2015) and as more organisations begin to voluntarily report pay figures by ethnicity, figures have emerged of the 8-13% pay gap experienced by BME employees at the 'big four' accountancy firms compared to white employees (Paisey & Wu, 2018).

Could targeted interventions could help improve equality of outcomes? This paper analyses the data collected from applicants to the Taylor Bennett Foundation (TBF) Training Programme, which aims to enhance employability for BME graduates interested in a career in corporate communications, with a focus on the development of industry-based social capital.

When developed and nourished, social capital helps to achieve personal, professional and organisational goals (Adler & Kwon, 2002) (Lin, 2002). Numerous studies have shown that individuals with little social capital are disadvantaged in terms of opportunities for gaining critical information or sponsorship ultimately leading to new positions (Granovetter, 1973; Lin & Dumin, 1986; Marsden & Hurlbert, 1988; Wayne, et al., 1999; Zippay, 2001). Job-seeking is made easier when people can access social capital and social networks, to gain information about opportunities (Lin, 1999; Zhang, et al., 2010; Fearon, et al., 2018).

Ethnic minorities, due to structural exclusion in an organisational setting, tend to have fewer connections with high status individuals and their ties can hold less instrumental value than those of their white peers (Ibarra, 1993; McGuire, 2000; Smith, 2000; Stainback, 2008). Few studies explore the context of ethnic minorities receiving assistance in developing their social capital to improve career prospects.

Social Capital:

This paper considers social capital as an aggregation of resources at the individual level (Lin, 1999). This assumes that one’s connections potentially give access to beneficial resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2002). The utilisation of these resources is an established area of research surrounding social capital, in the context of career-related outcomes e.g. (Granovetter, 1973) (Lin, et al., 1981) (Kramarz & Skans, 2014).

Weak ties – individuals on the periphery of a personal network, for example, acquaintances – are particularly useful in career-related contexts, according to network theory. High within group density renders much information contained within the cluster redundant, and therefore more valuable, the original information is likely obtained from weak ties, who belong to different social clusters (Burt, 2004).

Some studies operationalise the term ‘networking’ within this definitional framework of social capital e.g. (Forret & Dougherty, 2004) (Wolff & Moser, 2009) (Spurk, et al., 2015). It describes the process of generating, maintaining, and accessing social capital, in the context of career management (Wolff & Moser, 2009). When networking, people report feelings of moral impurity and “dirtiness” which reduces the frequency with which they network ((Casciaro, 2014)).

Structural inequality and BME social capital:

Structural inequality manifests itself not only in the constitution of social capital (or, access to connections) but also in returns from the expenditure of social capital. Ethnicity is one of three key sociodemographic markers as signposts of this manifestation, the other two being gender and inherited social class.

Previous research finds that women experience disadvantage to men in their access to weak ties (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982) (VanTubergen & Volker, 2015) (Verhaeghe, et al., 2013) found a significant, positive, effect of inherited social class on the ability to obtain a job through a family member for young people. Further research identifies processes of social capital deficits and uneven returns from expenditure for people of an ethnic minority background (Green, et al., 1995). The tendency to form relationships with those of similar characteristics perpetuates a cycle of social capital disadvantage (McPherson, et al., 2001) (McPherson, et al., 2006) (Verhaeghe, et al., 2015).

Two research questions are addressed by this paper (Table 1). The first (Research Question A) explores the experiences of BME graduates in transitioning from university study to early-career employment, in the context of the corporate communications industry, and reviews the likely impact of proactive intervention. The second research question (Research Question B) examines the role of social resources in shaping opportunity (or lack of opportunity) for individuals of BME origin in the graduate employment market, via the proxy of the corporate communications industry. Our hypothesis, based upon social capital literature and the hypothesis for Research Question A, therefore, was that when given access to high-quality contacts within the communications industry via a bespoke training programme, participants would better be able to visualise their path to a desired early-career position, and would feel that they had greater access to job market opportunities.

Research Questions – An exploration of BME graduates entering the communications industry:	
A – What are their experiences of the graduate employment market	B – What is the role of social resources in the graduate employment market

Table 1 – Research questions addressed by analysis.

Methodology and Method

Taylor Bennett Foundation (TBF) Training

Although there is variation within independent estimates of BME representation in the industry – the most recent studies indicate around 7% by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2017), and 11% by the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA, 2016) - both figures suggest underrepresentation, given that in the last Census in 2011, 14% of the population of England and Wales was of BME origin (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

TBF aims, via a 10-week training programme, to facilitate transitions from university for BME graduates who are interested in a career in corporate communications. TBF training delivers practical skills (e.g. how to draft a press release, how to run a social media campaign) and proactively delivers opportunities for trainees to build a network of new relationships that could support their careers. TBF consider that their programme, which is designed to both highlight the importance of, and to generate social capital, in addition to improving human capital, is a relatively original innovation, and it has won international praise (World Economic Forum, 2012) (McGregor-Smith, 2017)

Trainees are shortlisted from an open application; given limited resources, TBF is only able to offer training for six applicants per training programme. However, a mentor (up to four meetings) is offered for some selected applicants who were unsuccessful on the assessment day.

Research design

Annual feedback surveys of participants had previously suggested that the social capital elements of the training scheme had been valuable in their career progression (Taylor Bennett Foundation, 2017). In order to investigate further the critical factors in transitioning from university to employment (Research Question A) and the role of the TBF intervention is delivering support with this (Research Question B) semi-structured interviews were undertaken with applicants who took

part in the survey at one time point (following the training scheme).

Participant group	***n***	**Average age in years**	**Gender**		**Number of participants from a Russell Group university**	**Number of first-generation university students**	**Self-reported ethnic origins**			
			Male	**Female**			**Black**	**Asian**	**Arab**	**Mixed-race**
Trainees	12	22.8	8	4	6	7	6	4	0	2
Mentees	5	23.0	1	4	0	2	3	2	0	0
Non-intervention participants	12	23.1	6	6	1	7	3	4	1	4
Total	29		15	14	7	16	12	10	1	6

Table 2: Demographic information of TBF training applicants. 'First generation university students' refers to applicants whose parents have not studied at a university. N = 29.

Sample

Individual interviews were conducted with 29 participants who had applied for TBF training and attended an assessment day. See Table 2 for demographic information of the 29 participants, which indicates the sub-groups studied within the broad definition that is BME.

All participants had graduated from a UK university in the prior 24 months before applying to the scheme. Out of the 29 applicants, 12 participated in both training and mentoring (hereafter trainees), 5 participated in basic mentoring only (hereafter mentees), and 12 did not receive any element of the intervention (hereafter non-intervention participants). The table indicated the degree of intersectionality, eg a relatively high number of participants (16 out of 29) were first-generation university students.

Interview Protocol

Based on the literature review, 11 interview questions were prepared to explore access to social resources and career support required or received, and were generally the same for all participants, although a small number of questions were tailored based upon the participant status as a trainee, mentee, or non-intervention.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed using NVivo to organise data collected adhering to principles of grounded theory e.g. (Bryman, 2004). Four themes were ultimately identified, outlined in Table 3, and these are discussed in turn.

Number	Theme	Context
1	A challenging transition from university to employment	A – Intervention context
2	The role of connections for early-career graduates	
3	Understanding the value of connections	B – Benefits gained from intervention
4	Access to opportunity	

Table 3 – four themes identified by thematic analysis of interview transcripts, and corresponding research questions that the themes address.

Findings

Sampled graduates found transitioning from university to career-focused employment challenging, and the data indicated that a lack of access to informational resources was felt especially acutely.

Comparison of responses between trainees, mentees, and non-intervention participants highlighted how useful advice or sponsorship from social connections could make the difference between getting ‘on the ladder’ or getting stuck in a repetitive and disheartening cycle of applications and rejections. Support in the form of assistance with skills that help in securing employment (e.g. CV writing, interview), and well-placed sources for information within the communications industry about job opportunities, would largely not have been available to trainees and mentees prior to the establishment of mentoring relationships, and for the trainees, conditions within which industry connections could be formed and maintained.

The findings are discussed below according to the four themes identified, grouped in two contexts.

Intervention context - A challenging transition from university to employment

When participants were asked about their career journey since leaving university and their reasons for applying for TBF training, almost all discussed how challenging the transition to graduate employment had been. Participants reported a repetitive cycle of applications followed by multiple rejections with minimal feedback. Similar dissonances between post-university expectations and realities were a common theme amongst all categories of participants. Participants indicated that higher education was necessary, but insufficient when applying for graduate level jobs.

Intervention context - the role of connections for early-career graduates

In addition to experience being key to gain access to entry-level posts in the corporate communications industry, participants revealed that - in harmony with literature emphasising the importance of social capital in accessing employment-based opportunity - connections played an instrumental role for some. Most described leaving university with access to connections of only a low occupational status. These participants' experiences are more consistent with the literature which suggests that BME graduates – through structural disadvantage - have less access to the informational benefits of social capital (Verhaeghe, et al., 2015) most associated with weak ties (Lin, 2002). Common amongst participants of all categories was a lack of relatively basic informational support. This lack of access to relatively superficial guidance led to feelings verging upon helplessness amongst some in this period:

> *"It was really difficult because at that time I just graduated from university, and there was some support from university, but it's not as direct or helpful, or as tailored as TBF's. I didn't know where to really look or what to do so I felt like I was a little bit lost."* Mentee #2

When recalling struggles experienced in attempting to begin a formal career in corporate communications, no discernible difference was found between non-intervention participants, mentees, or trainees.

Intervention benefits - understanding of the value of connections

During the 10-week training period, trainees participate in sessions where they are introduced to the importance of building, maintaining and utilising career-based networks. (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Through their interactions and reinforcement of the potential value of a well-maintained industry support network by TBF support staff, further encouragement to embed network building and maintenance is intended.

Mentees do not receive any such support by design, although a motivated assigned mentor may advise on the potential benefits of a well-developed network and provide advice towards achieving this.

In interviews conducted after the intervention, benefits associated with receiving the full intervention, in comparison with both partial-and-non-intervention, are apparent. Trainees tended to show a quite comprehensive understanding of how industry contacts could be activated to their benefit. They also understood that to be in a position to seek assistance from well-placed contacts, relationships required nourishment and maintenance (Bourdieu, 1986).

In contrast, mentees and non-intervention participants struggled to conceptualise potential benefits of contacts, within or outside of the PR industry.

Intervention benefits – access to opportunity

The final theme provides an identification of ways in which the intervention impacted on participants' careers. Some mentees felt that their mentors had provided them with invaluable support and advice that they would be able to beneficially utilise. For example, Mentee #3's mentor was a PR director who offered to conduct mock interviews with him:

> *"It helped a lot in shaping my interview skills because I was very naive of the questions. [The mentor] gave me in-depth knowledge of what type of questions were going to come up and what type of body language is expected from me."* Mentee #3

Not all mentors were able to dedicate as much time to their mentees as Mentee 3's mentor. This led to a varying level of benefits described by the mentees. Present data suggests therefore that the partial intervention produced mixed outcomes that were largely dependent on the availability and capacities of the mentors. In contrast to the mentees, trainees consistently felt that the full intervention had provided them with a large amount of potential informational resources. For example, upon completion of the 10-week programme, Trainee #2 had secured a job as a junior account executive with a small agency:

> *"TBF training gave me a lot of contacts. We visited so many agencies ... It's given us mentors. I think it's definitely going to be helpful in the future ... because in communications everybody knows everybody."* Trainee #2.

Like many trainees, Trainee #2 saw her new contacts as likely to be useful resources in her PR career, and the position she had secured was facilitated by a networking visit as part of TBF training.

Although data suggests that the partial intervention produced mixed outcomes, interviews suggest that the intervention facilitated access to a range of realised and potential opportunities. Based upon our sample, such high-quality connections would not have been ordinarily accessible to the trainees.

Discussion

Thematic analysis of interview data from two TBF training cohort applicants has enabled the identification of a number of themes pertinent to relevant academic fields. An exploration of the requirement for a graduate human-and-social capital-based training intervention, and effects of the experience, provide encouragingly interesting findings that require further investigation using a greater sample and breadth of data.

Pertaining to Research Question A, interviews revealed a disconnect between expectations of graduates following completion of studies and the realities of early-career employment market navigation. Participants felt that their university degrees alone were not enough to ensure that they appealed to employers advertising internships or other training schemes in a perceived crowded market. These perceptions appear grounded in reality, which may suggest that UK universities at an aggregate level do not supply comprehensive employability support. This is surprising given the importance attached to graduate employability metrics in university league tables e.g. (The Complete University Guide, 2020); (The Guardian, 2020).

Although no comparable, white British population is sampled presently, structural deficits in social resources available to the BME population (Verhaeghe, et al., 2015), and value of returns when these resources are activated (Green, et al., 1995) suggest that BME graduates would particularly benefit from such a targeted intervention.

The effects of participation in the full and partial intervention on both available social resources and ultimately, career outcomes (Research Question B), are not comprehensively assessed by this paper. In addition to sampling limitations, the selection mechanism for the training scheme means that the most talented applicants receive the full intervention, who are likely to go on to be better at developing social resources and have better career outcomes organically. Therefore, an empirical assessment of the impact of the full and partial interventions is particularly difficult.

Conclusion

The study reported in this paper indicates that social capital boosts the career prospects of those participants subject to the full intervention and to a lesser extent those subject to the partial intervention. These fostered connections helped develop knowledge and skills regarding important aspects of career entry, including CV writing, interviewing techniques, and further insight into how the industry is structured and functions. Analyses presented do not give insight into the specific intersection of BME graduates and social capital, due to lack of a comparable white control group. Other scholars suggest that the assumption of BME individuals' limited access to social resources in a career context is supported e.g. (Wilson, 1996) (Elliott, 1999) (McGuire, 2000) and that mentoring, in particular, is of especial help to minority ethnic individuals at different career stages e.g. (Harris & Lee, 2019) (Chelberg & Bosman, 2020; Bhopal, 2020) (Peterson & Ramsay, 2021).

Limited evidence was available to systematically unpick linkages between tie types and associated outcomes, or processes by which participants with useful connections activated their social capital and used it for personal gain. Interviews did suggest, however, that both structured (mentoring relationships) and unstructured (industry stakeholders met on visits) weak tie interactions produced a range of informational benefits. Such processes were found to occur prior to the TBF assessment day too, most commonly in hearing about the training scheme. These findings correlate with literature suggesting efficacy of weak tie relationships for gaining valuable information (Burt, 1992) such as job appointments (Granovetter, 1973) (Lin & Dumin, 1986) (Zippay, 2001) .

In summary, the themes identified by and emerging from, this research indicate that structured intervention may be able to deliver tangible social resources to support career entry. The research will be extended to additional cohorts of trainees to see if these themes continue to develop, and the employment outcomes will be monitored.

This is expected to deliver learnings for policy makers, and, given the relative lack of comprehensive employability provision in UK universities (Minocha, et al., 2017) (Tomlinson & Nghia, 2020), for higher education institutions, seeking to address inequality of access to graduate-level jobs.

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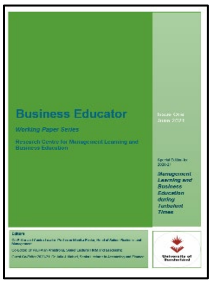

An academic journey from disruption and discomfort to a digital curriculum by transforming professional disposition.

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Abstract

The speed and significance of change affecting all aspects of life over the past year has been unprecedented. Within an educational environment, this turbulence, disruption and discomfort has resulted in a changing mindset for both academic staff and students. By taking a collaborative autoethnographic approach, this paper captures four reflections from academic staff on their experiences of teaching and learning during the COVID pandemic. Themes emerging from the analysis highlight the experiences of academic staff looking for and experimenting with different approaches to module delivery and changing module content, exploring the use of technology to enable shared learning for staff and students together.

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Introduction

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 has had a huge impact on all industries and sectors, and education is no exception. Since December 2019 a new lexicon has crept into our everyday language. Words and phrases such as Covid-19; transmission rate; regional tiers and lockdown to name but a few are in regular use around the world. A common vernacular has also crept into our academic lives. Much debated terms such as blended learning, hybrid delivery and the flipped classroom have been around for some time however they are now supplemented with notions of students in self isolation rather the classroom, special (emergency) assessment regulations, and the need for no detriment to the students due to the pandemic. The common theme to these scenarios is speed. Speed of transmission and the speed of transition is reciprocal to both the pandemic and the 'New World' of University education. Although not a new concept in HE (see Berg and Seeber, 2016, 2013; Land, 2013), the inevitable consequence of this speed has, for some, been an academic journey of disruption and discomfort through a landscape of digital delivery and transformational learning for both the student and the academic.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic it is highlighted that the most significant internal challenge for Business Schools has been adjusting to their new learning environment (Wanot, 2021), which provides the backdrop to this paper. More specifically, this paper presents and analyses short reflective accounts concerning experiences of working at a time of increased isolation and significant disruption to not only learning and teaching practices in the classroom, but also interactions with colleagues.

Literature Review

Nolan and Molla (2018) write about professional learning through a pedagogy of discomfort, focusing on teacher professional learning and positioning that learning in the context of reflective practice. This in turn focussed on Boler and Zembylas' (2003) idea of a pedagogy of discomfort which is concerned with critical thought on a present situation which is moving individuals out of their comfort zone. In this paper, we suggest that this is exactly what we have gone through during the last twelve months as we have continued our professional service to our students at a time of considerable turbulence. Building on the propositions of Nolan and Molla (2018) we examine the interrelated processes of disjuncture, deliberation and disposition through the lens of four vignettes. Each account draws from our experiences of teaching modules on an MBA programme to an audience of mainly international postgraduate students who themselves at various times have experienced their own journey of disruption and discomfort whilst attempting to study a programme which was not designed initially for the delivery format they were required to endure.

According to Nolan and Molla (2018), 'disjuncture' refers to a situation where there is a disharmony or disconnect between what is currently happening and our values, providing an opportunity for learning through a process of reflection. This reflection is the second part of Nolan and Molla's (2018) process which requires critical reflection on the disjuncture, referred to as 'deliberation'. The third phase of this reflective process concerns the transformations of professional dispositions, encouraging the consideration of whether values or professional dispositions have been altered in light of the reflection on disjuncture. This approach to critically reflect on professional practice provides a useful framework, particularly when we consider the events of the past year, which is also advocated by Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2013).

Methodology and Method

Four colleagues, who teach on different branches of the same postgraduate programme, came together during an online session which was aimed at supporting research and writing. Sharing the experiences of teaching on the same programme, we agreed that we would like to undertake a piece of writing between us, rather than alone, and so a mini 'research group' was established. Our discussions and individual comments led us to the conclusion that our experiences can be linked to Nolan and Molla (2018) in terms of the ideas of disjuncture, deliberation and disposition we shared. Whilst initially these terms may not have been clear in our minds, conversations led us to these views and the usefulness of recording our thinking, on an individual basis, to enable themes for further discussion to be established.

The reflections provide anecdotal vignettes from four business educationalists who were keen to share their experiences of supporting and teaching postgraduate students in the current pandemic environment. Owing to the multiple professional reflections and the individual and emotional nature of the writing on which this paper is constructed, a collaborative autoethnographic approach is an appropriate research design (Lapadat, 2017; Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez, 2013). More specifically, Lapadat (2017, p.590) posits collaborative autoethnography as an approach whereby multiple researchers 'share personal stories and interpret the pooled autoethnographic data' which is the approach taken to construct this paper. This approach has been used elsewhere to not only frame research into teaching practice (Hains-Wesson and Young, 2016), but also to facilitate collaborative research during the isolating and socially distanced times of the global pandemic (Roy and Uekusa, 2020).

More specifically, the four accounts have been written with the COVID-19 pandemic in mind, providing reflections on aspects of the learning and teaching environment from this past year. Furthermore, we draw on our experiences and initial discussions and build on the common ground of working within the same faculty and on a shared programme of study. Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2013) acknowledges collaborative autoethnography as a powerful method of teambuilding which enhances not only trust relationships among co-researchers but also promotes creativity and collegial feedback and mentorship. This collaborative approach is particularly timely when colleagues are experiencing feelings of disassociation and working in isolation.

Having each written a reflective account, the first stage of analysis was for one member of the group, who has experience of qualitative analysis, to identify codes within each account and then create themes, from initial codes (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). For the second phase of analysis, each writer worked through their narrative and used the existing themes to code their narratives. Where there was no match between data (narrative) and existing themes, additional themes were suggested. Thereafter, the group came together to undertake a discussion of emergent themes from the accounts, entailing processes of reviewing the vignettes, categorising themes and regrouping themes (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez, 2013).

Findings and Discussion

Reflection 1

It felt like from disjuncture to deliberation in the space of a month! The first lockdown in February 2020 resulted in fervour and discomfort which was not envisaged just a few weeks before during the Christmas vacation. Semester one teaching had progressed well and assessments were eagerly anticipated. Looking back the classroom was a safe and professional environment for both student and teacher where discussion and debate could flourish. We could physically see one another and hear clearly what was said whilst looking directly at each other. In this context, my view was that the needs and aspirations of our student community are key to the development and delivery of any successful programme and the MBA teaching team pride themselves on responding positively to those needs and aspirations. Yet within the space of a few weeks in the new year, I/we completely transformed what and how I/we taught.

As a teaching team, we needed to work together to ensure that those needs and aspirations were met whilst as an individual, I needed to ensure that what was on the Canvas site was not only correct in terms of learning outcomes and relevance to the curriculum but that it also met the requirements of a digital platform not originally set up for the online delivery of all the material present. This was my disjuncture.
Looking back and deliberating after the delivery of the first Semester of 2020/1 my overriding emotion was one of relief. Yes, I am sure it could and will be better, but it worked. The students listened, commented and asked questions and the assessments were submitted. My disposition is now one of continuation.

Continuation of my learning of the skills required for the digital arena, a continuation of the interaction with my colleagues to ensure a programme that meets the needs and expectations of our students and above all the continuation of my sense that all will be well at some point. How I long for the day when all my students turn on their cameras and wave! The day that happens the first day of the rest of my journey will be complete.

Reflection 2

Every so often there is a historical event of such magnitude that it challenges business 'prac-ademics' to re-think teaching contexts. The credit crunch, 2008 challenged us to rethink our practice; a global economic crisis on a global scale. COVID was just as immediate however the gravity with its instant impact on everyone's lives and well-being was incomprehensible. I reflected on how we had to adapt and find new ways to achieve even the simplest of everyday tasks. Our student community, many still acclimatising to living in the UK, were assigned to lockdown and immediate and total immersion in this changing world. In the marketing classroom, this pushed my focus on how to teach the 'delivery of value' much further into the spotlight.

I felt an immediate disjuncture at the start of term; it appeared the case studies were being rewritten around us! We quickly witnessed new patterns of media consumption, rapid shifts in buyer behaviours, everyday innovation, new models of value delivery to meet new customer needs, declining sectors, agile technologies reshaping business ecosystems… too much to summarise. A key reflection; how do we as educators embrace technology and deliver effectively to satisfy the needs of our students!

My deliberation: how do I close the gap between where we were and where we are now. I worried would the students challenge me with an expectation that I had appraised our new world.

I reflected on what contextualisation means, '…to put (a linguistic element, an action, etc.) in a context especially one that is characteristic or appropriate, for purposes of study. I soon realised that whilst this had come upon us rapidly my class were very quickly self- evaluating their personal environments, their daily 'social media' lives, their interactions with brands and businesses. As a result, I have enhanced focus on 'contextual learning', whereby students construct their own meaning based on their own experiences. There was no need to over think the currency of contexts! Together with the students we created a learning environment whereby the original vignettes would and did serve to support debate, contrasts leading to a new strategy, platforms for the evaluation of change; engendering problem solving and solution seeking. We shared the disjuncture due to the current environment; not only from the textbooks, current news; particularly the lived experience of having to embrace new technology in the classroom which has, in turn, provided an appreciation for the lived experiences facing the new global workforce.

My cohort have since submitted their semester one assessments, in which they map the customer journey in support of a new business challenge posed by the external environment. Many have sought the opportunity to address the challenges posed by COVID with original thinking around the deployment of new and exciting technologies and innovative marketing.

Reflection 3

The pandemic has decreased the number of Chinese students studying in UK universities, Covid and the lockdown changed the composition of my MBA class silently resulting in online teaching being a disjuncture which meant effective communication during online teaching only happened with greater language competence together with students' clear learning motivation and engagement. This disposition is therefore one of constant adjustment and deployment of engagement strategies alongside the motivation of students.

Academics and students were involved in this intensive change curve during the 1st lockdown, but their motive and initiative of participating in the changes led to variations of speed and level of coping and adaptation themselves during this process. In this fast pace of transition and transformation, human factors, such as cross-cultural understanding and discourse on mutual needs and expectations become an indispensable foundation for effective communication and even became the prerequisite and key driver to student engagement.

Having high-level online engagement from international MBA students who come from different parts of the world whilst they may be remaining in their home countries is a critical issue. Developing relationships is crucial, so to create collaborative engagement opportunities I encouraged my MBA students to form groups of 6,7 with varied cultural backgrounds, using social media, which students reflected was beneficial for their studies during the lockdown. Informal or social engagement opportunities with instructors is also important for student learning, both online and face-to-face. An example of emotional engagement is from a student from India who shared her profile with other classmates online during the 'alternative CV' session. She shared her love of writing poems and spoke of her published album. The student was very excited and motivated, becoming highly engaged and cooperative. After the lesson, the student wrote to me expressing her feeling of inclusiveness and was motivated to learn more. This practical experience verified that social engagement involves building rapport, respect, and trust to create a sense of belonging and group cohesion within a learning community. I believe the pandemic brings about an excellent opportunity for stakeholders to re-think and even re-design an effective risk-management plan to increase the sustainability and resilience of our sector in the future. Students from different backgrounds require different levels of support in online communication. I believe a cultural gap exists between individuals in online education and communication, and that “participation rates differ by cultural grouping”. I think it is crucial to explore the concerns of our international students and to continue learning their characteristics while engaging in online study and develop strategies to reduce those concerns.

Reflection 4

The disjuncture was having to design and teach a module wholly online. Preparing the module was challenging as although I have experience in planning and designing teaching materials, this has centered on face-to-face teaching. Having to design a module to be delivered online prompted me to think very differently. Having had the experience of teaching the first semester my overall reflection is one of pleasant surprise at the engagement of the students with the various activities, through post-semester feedback.

To give students an opportunity to not only engage with the module but also cultivate a sense of community, one of the activities I experimented with was to ask students to present an 'alternative CV’. The intention was to provide students with a space in which they felt comfortable to articulate aspects of themselves. A collaborative feedback sheet was available for everyone involved in the module (including myself) to offer reflections on each alternative CV. Beforehand I was anxious about the levels of engagement, technological issues, and students’ perceptions of this activity. However, attendance was high and all students participated in the task. Some students had prepared a slide to present whilst others spoke freely. There were some students whose devices did not allow them to activate their video, but where the technology allowed, and students were happy to, cameras were switched on. However, I was less concerned with the use of cameras and more concerned that students felt comfortable to engage with this activity and took something away from the experience.

As the semester progressed, it became apparent from engagement levels, evidence from in-depth discussions and anecdotal feedback that breakout rooms were important to students as a place to ‘go’ and a space to talk with peers to articulate thinking and share ideas. The breakout rooms were used for students to share their understanding of pre-released materials and capture their ‘group think’ about directed questions. From my perspective, the use of breakout rooms provided a whole range of exacting considerations, including how many rooms to open, whether to assign students manually, whether to give students screenshots of the activity in the chat or attach a word document with the activity and space for them to collate their thinking and to ask if additional time was needed. Therefore, a challenge for me has been gauging subtle aspects of learning and teaching interactions.

On reflection, the previous semester was a significant learning experience. Rather than shifts having happened, I believe that shifts in my professional disposition are *happening*; the focus being a process of learning rather than highlighting an end product of learning. I am noticing my increasing comfort with experimenting with aspects of professional practice and communicating this to students, therefore taking students on the journey with me. For instance, the functional process of opening and managing breakout rooms was communicated to students as ‘let’s give this a try and see how it works; I talked about taking a risk and seeing what we learn from the experience, and the student feedback was encouraging as overwhelmingly they commented on the value of being able to connect with peers and share ideas. Where there have been technical issues faced by students not being able to use their microphone or having a poor network, students helped each other out by communicating through written chat functions and passing on hints and tips around connectivity, evidencing a turbulent yet shared learning experience.

Discussion

From the analysis undertaken, seven themes emerged from the reflective accounts concerning the altered environment, the speed of change, the use of technology, cultivating a sense of 'community' online, sharing practices and experiences, educators experimenting and learning from the experience of working in an altered environment, and the affective dimension of this.

Not surprisingly, the collective disjuncture centers around the challenges faced concerning the significant changes required when teaching in a fundamentally altered environment, from face-to-face to wholly online.

> 'Preparing the module was challenging as although I have experience of planning and designing teaching materials, this has centered on face-to-face teaching' [reflection 4].

Another facet of the collective disjuncture is, not surprisingly, the speed at which these changes have had to happen. The use of vocabularies such as turbulence, disruption, and trauma within the reflections connect with Mezirow's (2018) concept of disorientation. More specifically, reflections such as 'immediate impact' and immediate disjuncture' [reflection 2] and 'it felt like disjuncture to deliberation in a month' [reflection 1] resonate with Mezirow's (2018, p118) epochal transformation, characterised by 'sudden reorientations' rather than more cumulative or gradual change. Whilst Mok et al (2020) write about the pandemic providing opportunities to re-think and re-design higher education, the impact of such significant and rapid shifts should not be overlooked.

A third theme emerging from the reflective deliberations is the use of technology to enable continuous learning for staff and students:

> '...within the space of a few weeks in the new year, I/we completely transformed what and how I/we taught' [reflection 1]

> '…how do we as educators embrace technology and deliver effectively to satisfy the needs of our students!' [reflection 2]

‘I think it is crucial to explore the concerns of our international students and their characteristics while engaging with online study and develop strategies to reduce those concerns.’ [reflection 3]

‘... Having to design a module to be delivered online prompted me to think very differently’ [reflection 4]

However, there is recognition that the learning being undertaken by the four academic staff concerns not only the technology but also how it can be used to facilitate student learning and cultivate a sense of community which Redmond et.al (2018) notes are significant for effective online learning environments:

‘...to create collaborative engagement opportunities, the week before the first lockdown, I encouraged my MBA students to form groups of 6,7 with varied cultural backgrounds by using social media’ [reflection 3]

‘As the semester progressed, it became apparent from engagement levels, evidence from in-depth discussions and anecdotal feedback that breakout rooms were important to students as a place to ‘go’ and a space to talk with peers to articulate thinking and share ideas’ [reflection 4]

Whilst it is emerging that we were keen to cultivate a sense of community through activities which were designed into the curriculum, it would be worthwhile to gain students’ experiences of these designs.

There is also an emerging sentiment of sharing experiences across staff and students:

‘We shared the disjuncture due to the current environment; not only from the textbooks and current news; particularly the lived experience of embracing new technology in the classroom. This has, in turn, provided an appreciation for the lived experiences facing the new global workforce’ [reflection 2]

‘This example in practice verified that social engagement involves building rapport, respect, and trust to create a sense of belonging and group cohesion within a learning community, which is especially important at this time for international students coming far away and leaving their family and home country' [reflection 3]

From these extracts (above), there is a sense that we are conscious of the change happening around us and the impact that this is having not only on ourselves but also on the students both academically, personally and socially.

Another theme emerging from the reflective deliberations concerns academic staff looking for and experimenting with different approaches to module content to ensure parity of experience.

> 'I needed to ensure that what was on the Canvas site was not only correct in terms of learning outcomes and relevance to the curriculum...' [reflection 1]
>
> '...it appeared the case studies were being rewritten around us!' [reflection 2]
>
> 'To give students an opportunity to not only engage with the module but also cultivate a sense of community, one of the activities I experimented with was to ask students to present an 'alternative CV'' [reflection 4]

When considering Nolan and Molla's (2018) concept of transforming professional dispositions, the reflections convey a sense with which we are operating with a shared mindset of professional learn*ing* - with an emphasis on this being a current process that we are still experiencing:

> 'My disposition is now one of continuation. Continuation of my learning of the skills required for the digital arena, a continuation of the interaction with my colleagues to ensure a programme that meets the needs and expectations of our students and above all the continuation of my sense of humour that all will be well at some point' [reflection 1]
>
> As a result, I have enhanced focus on 'contextual learning', whereby students construct their own meaning based on their own experiences [reflection 2]
>
> '...to continue learning their characteristics' [reflection 3]

‘Rather than shifts having happened, I believe that shifts in my professional disposition are *happening’* [reflection 4]

There was also recognition of the outcomes of professional learning and experimentation which was taking place:

‘Many have sought the opportunity to address the challenges posed by COVID with original thinking around the deployment of new and exciting technologies and innovative marketing’ [reflection 2]

‘Having had the experience of teaching the first semester my overall reflection is one of pleasant surprise at the engagement of the students with the various activities, through post-semester feedback’ [reflection 4]

Interestingly, these two extracts mention more positive emotions despite the initially recognised discomfort and disorientation of the wider situation. Having experienced the discomfort and worked within this disorientating context, both extracts highlighting the affective outcomes of these episodes of professional learning.

Although observed as an area which has been typically neglected in UK-based literature concerning learning and teaching in HE (Quinlan, 2016), learning is an emotional process and there is the acknowledgement of the affective dimension within reflections:

‘I worried would the students challenge me with an expectation that I had appraised our new world’ [reflection 2]

‘Beforehand I was anxious about the levels of engagement, technological issues, and students’ perceptions of this activity [reflection 4]

Conclusion

Within the dramatically altered HE environment of the past year, this paper is the result of four colleagues sharing their experiences of teaching and supporting students online, and collaboratively reflecting on aspects of professional practice. Moreover, collaborative autoethnography provides a suitable framework for the approach taken in not only sharing professional and personal stories but also analysing their contributions to a shared understanding of the experiences of four colleagues.

Whilst making use of the technology is an aspect which emerges across the reflections, there are also other issues of significance, such as ensuring relevant and up-to-date module content, and providing opportunities for students to feel a sense of belonging to the programme with their peers and academic staff and feeling the pressure to create parity of experience in a new world. Therefore, within the current turbulent environment, this paper evidences the collective stories of academic staff who are not only navigating the new environment but also experimenting with ways of providing opportunities for students to continue learning with their peers. Whilst the initial assumptions of the paper were generally the speed of change and the notion of discomfort, interestingly analysis of the four reflective accounts have highlighted other dimensions of this pedagogical discomfort in addition to that of speed.

Whilst this paper highlights perspectives of four academic colleagues, the reflections have hinted at our observations of and anecdotal feedback from students. Therefore, more detailed insight into students' experiences of learning in a COVID environment would be a valuable addition to these initial reflections. Additionally, as we reflect back on these experiences and begin looking ahead to a hybrid model of learning and teaching, it will be interesting to continue to capture the professional learning gained and how these feeds into our module planning and curriculum design going forward.

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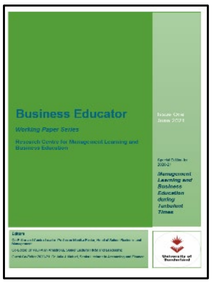

Defining key factors that influence ‘the student experience’.

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Abstract

Universities, now more than ever, operate in an increasingly challenging environment with students increasingly aware of the importance of a satisfactory university experience. This paper looks to explore the factors that can influence the student experience within an institution using a developed framework based upon Plato’s allegory of the Cave. The rationale for this is that a satisfactory student experience can lead to many benefits for the university, including positive feedback and increased word of mouth reviews. However, if the institution does not meet the needs of their students there is an indication in the literature that shows a poor student experience can lead to negative student perceptions of their university experience. The qualitative methodology applied an interpretivist philosophy and used focus groups to explore the key themes, defined from the conceptual framework, that impacted the student experience. These were deemed to be ‘student expectations’ and ‘student perceptions. This paper has found that the student experience is directly influenced by these two factors and that students being engaged with the university was a key factor in feeling established within the institution and creating a positive university experience.

Keywords:

University experience

Student expectations

Student perceptions

Student satisfaction

Undergraduate study

Higher education

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Introduction

The concept of the university experience has been widely explored (Douglas et al, 2006; Alves and Raposo, 2010: Meehan and Howells, 2018, El Said, 2021) and key factors which influence the experience defined. These include; the role of academic staff, the student environment created within the university, previous institution experiences of the student and the influence of family and friends amongst others. Once these factors are understood then they may become easier to manage for the institution and increase the likelihood of creating a satisfactory university experience for their students.

This paper will use a developed framework to develop and establish the key factors that influence the student experience received within an HEI. The research collected will show that by understanding the key influencers on the student experience, universities are in a better position to effectively meet the needs of their students and increase the likelihood of a satisfactory experience within the institution.

Literature Review

This paper aims to further investigate previous research undertaken by the author and will be using a conceptual framework developed to explore the key factors of the student experience, see figure 1 below for framework. The research identified that a gap in the literature in relation to the influencers upon pre-university perceptions and how these inform the expectations of the student upon their chosen university. The models and theory explored also failed to identify the key drivers for students' post-university (after Graduation) which is identified by this researcher as being an important factor upon student expectations (Price, 2018). Plato's allegory of the cave was used as the philosophical viewpoint upon which the conceptual framework was based. The key dimensions of the philosophy were used and adapted as a representation on which the framework was built.

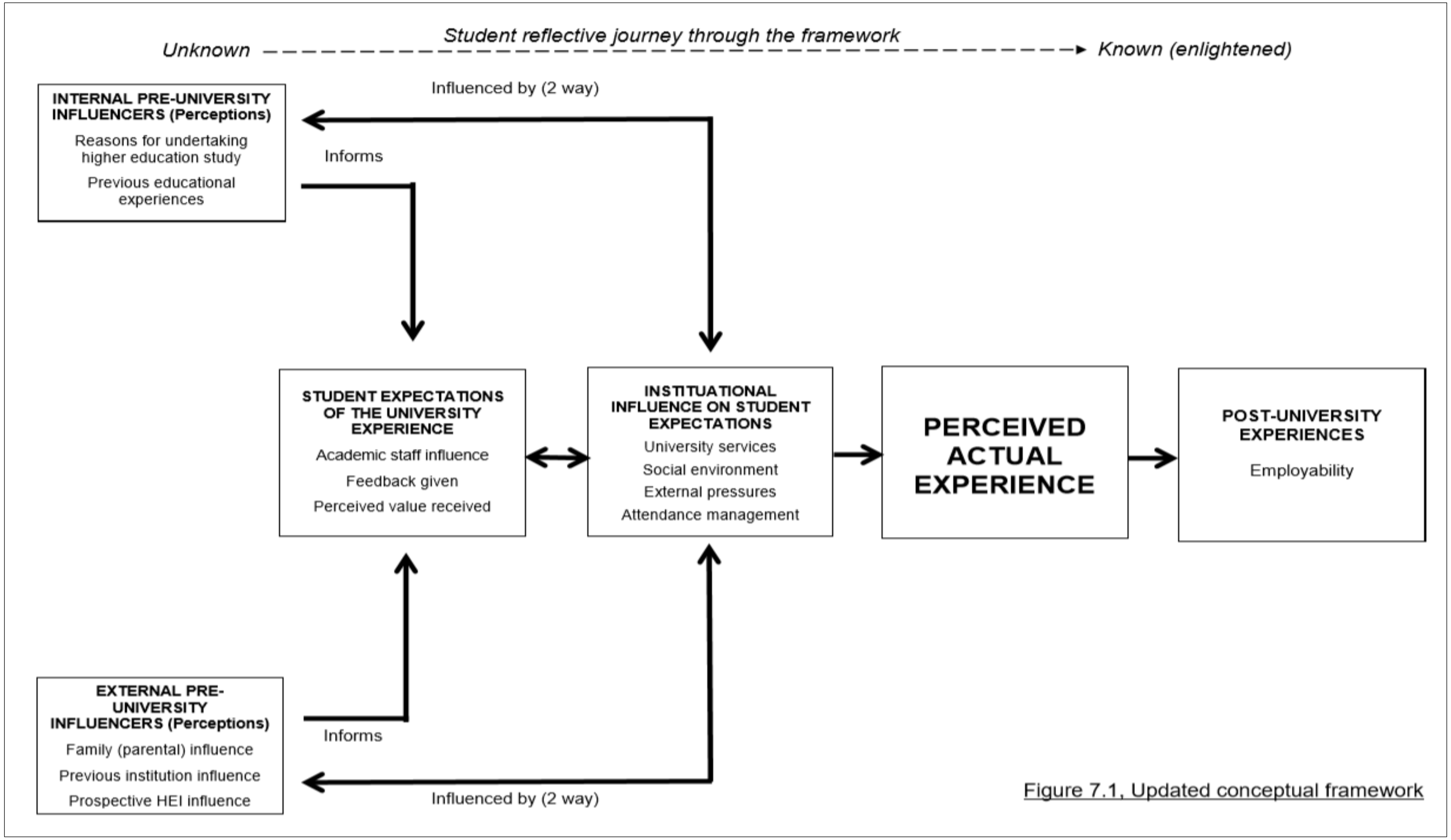

Figure 1, Developed Framework to define influencers of the student experience (Price, 2018)

The framework identified that there are several influences on the student experience, these include; the student experience, quality of service, student perceptions and student expectations (Alves and Raposo, 2010; Latif et al., 2019; Teeroovengadum et al., 2019). For the purpose of this report, the focus will be on two key factors identified as being significant drivers of the university student experience, these being: 'student perception and 'student expectations. This is visualised in figure 2 below.

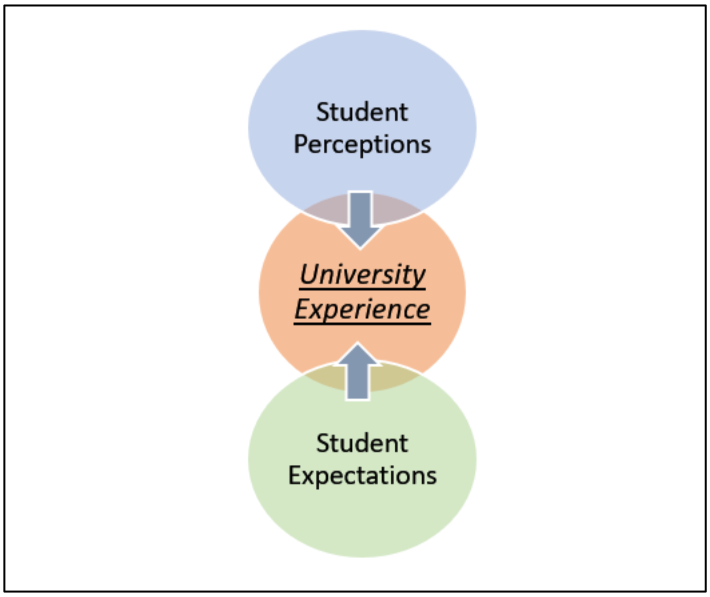

Figure 2, Factors influencing the university experience

Student Perceptions

How student perceive their higher education experience is an important consideration for institutions as it will set a gauge for which experiences are judged, positively or negatively (Tomlinson, 2008). Some researchers deem perception as the influences on students' view in their choice of institution, e.g. this could be academic reputation for some, but location or facilities may be more important for others (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013; Nadelson et al., 2013; Redmehr et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2020). The perception of many students is that university study can improve or even guarantee employment after Graduation. Indeed, research by Tomlinson (2008), found that 'higher education credentials were seen as positional goods and a key dimension of future employability'. This, therefore, supports the view that a university degree will enable a greater number of benefits compared to those who do not attend university i.e. work-related, economic, and social. Thus, the notion of students viewing higher education as an 'investment' for future successes, even if that belief does not have any direct or immediate assurance of employment is valid. For students who had a limited sense of how they might be able to apply their university experiences to the job market, they still had a sense that university will 'lead to something' upon Graduation (Tomlinson, 2017; Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016; Woya, 2019). Scutter et al (2011) underpin this view and found that employability aspirations, not necessarily were seen as the key reason students choose to go to university. This suggests that improving career aspirations were a key driver for enrolling on higher education qualification. Dandridge (2018) identified that students place value on their university experience and rate teaching standards, quality of feedback, good learning resources and securing a good graduate job as the most important factors to them.

Student perceptions are likely to be reinforced by the growing marketisation and changing financial landscape of higher education (Naidoo, 2003; Brown and Carasso, 2013; Mok and Montgomery, 2021). Inevitably, this highly competitive marketplace has led to institutions having to adapt their marketing strategies and has, in some quarters, led to some theorists defining students as customers or as products with the academics being the service providers (Tierney, 1999; Bowden, 2011; Woodall et al, 2014; Guilbault, 2018), a new definition that has not been without criticism and resistance (Svensson and Wood, 2007). In this sense, Barrett (1996) explains that HEI's must adopt and welcome a marketing focus towards their recruitment of students. These comments show that the marketisation of higher education is becoming ever more apparent and as such can be regarded as a business like any other with institutions now becoming aware of the implications of service provision to their students/customers.

The notion of students' preparedness for entering higher education in relation to the learning environment they will enter and the impact this has on their behaviour when at the institution (Heikkilä and Lonka, 2006). Briggs et al. (2012) identify that the student transition from college can bring challenges for the university and that appropriate relationships need to be developed for students to settle into university life and ultimately succeed as higher education learners. Authors identify the contrast that students experience, in terms of the learning environment, between secondary/further education and higher education (Christie et al., 2006; Gibney et al., 2011; Young et al, 2020). The teaching environment in further education differs from the higher education atmosphere as it tends to be highly supportive and structured in comparison to higher education. This differential in the environment can impact upon the expectations of students when arriving at their HEI and their satisfaction with the provision offered.

The notion of student satisfaction is indeed linked to how their perceptions within the institution are deemed 'to be met' with their educational experience is now considered, by some, to be similar to customer satisfaction within services (Appleton-Knapp and Krentler, 2006). Satisfaction can be defined as a state felt by a person who has experienced performance or an outcome that fulfils their expectations (Krentler and Grundnitski, 2004). When exploring student satisfaction within the higher education sector, authors have defined the topic differently and as such, there is a range of definitions on the subject of student satisfaction and the impact upon the student experience (Athiyaman 1997; Wiers Jenssen et al., 2002; Forrester, 2006; Walker and Palmer, 2011, Chaudhary and Dey, 2020). Student satisfaction refers to the favourability of a student's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with their education (Oliver, 1989; Elliott and Shin, 2002, Winstone et al., 2021).

The relevance to this in terms of the marketisation of HE is how these are used by students to evaluate their university experience. Indeed, external institutes are increasingly used to draw together the views from students on their institution's performance (Subrahmanyam, 2017). One of the most commonly accepted of these is the National Student Survey (NSS), which gathers opinions from their students about their time at their university (www.thestudentsurvey.com, 2021). The survey is undertaken by students at all UK publicly funded universities to collect satisfaction data (Williams, 2002). The survey collects data on a range of topics that influence the satisfaction of students within a higher education institution and encompasses the whole university experience from the campus facilities to interactions with staff and peers (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Rowly, 2003). The results of these surveys are often used by prospective students to gauge the institutions' performance, as such, it is the HEI's interest to effectively manage these views.

When exploring a student's journey through their HEI, it is widely accepted that the first year of study is viewed as critical in ensuring that students engage with their programme of study and are successful in achievement (Trotter and Roberts, 2006). Byrne and Flood (2005) explored the perceptions of students at the beginning of their higher education studies and identified that those with positive preceding academic performance related to a confident progression to their HEI. As such this paper will predominately explore this from a first-year perspective but will also look at how this relates to the 'student journey' through their university experience by also exploring years two and three.

Student Expectations

Many studies have examined student expectations within higher education (Gedye et al., 2004; Longden, 2006; Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Bates and Kaye, 2014). Marshall and Linder (2005) analysed students' expectations of teaching in HEI's and defined that a range of different expectations exists. These findings show there is a mixed understanding among students of their expectations and understandings of the role of the institution in their studies. As such, analysis of student expectations is an important consideration for HEI's (Hill, 1995; Sander et al., 2000). Students' when first entering the higher education environment can often have unrealistic expectations of their expected university experience and as such may influence the perception of the experience they expect to receive. Hill (1995) identifies that student expectations in academic characteristics of their higher education provision, such as quality of teaching and methods, have remained relatively stable over time. As such it is a case of informing and educating students of this in order that they are as aware as possible of institutional behaviours. Studies (Rodie and Kleine, 2000) have demonstrated the positive impact of managing expectations and identifying key variables such as participation, role clarity, and motivation to participate in the student experience (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2000).

Student expectations are constantly evolving, and the ongoing global pandemic is a good example of how this has only been heightened (Aucejo, 2020). For example, HEI's have had to adapt to an online approach to teaching during the pandemic and as such many will continue with a blended learning approach moving forward. As such, students' expectations of their programme offering may differ and therefore institutions will need to carefully manage this to ensure the student experience is satisfactory (Suleri, 2020). Thus, it can be seen that there is a relationship between students' expectations and their satisfaction within the intuition, and as such, this report will look to explore this relationship further.

Another consideration when exploring student expectations is in relation to their personal motivators for studying a higher education programme and how this influences their expectations of the institution. Extrinsic motivations, such as career opportunities upon Graduation and intrinsic motivators such as academic reasons i.e. programme /subject challenge, are often seen as key factors in students' motivation to go to university. Rawson (2000) identifies that an important outcome of the higher education process for the great majority of participants in the achievement of a recognised qualification. De Lange and Mavondo (2004) state that some students are motivated by the notion of intellectual growth as opposed to directing linking to financial reward through career advancement. Other motivations relate to the influence of parents, social factors and occupational motives (Byrne and Flood, 2005; Christie et al., 2006; Chavan and Carter, 2018). Further research recognises that the initial motivator for participation in higher education has a direct influence on how students subsequently behave at university (Gibney et al., 2011; Hassel and Ridout, 2018).

This section has explored some factors which influence the university experience based upon two chosen key drivers of perception and expectation. The literature debated the key influencers upon student expectations including teaching and support staff, academic performance and personal development. Literature relating to student perception identified that rationale for the choice of the institution was varied and was influenced by many factors. Employability post-graduation was deemed to be a key for HE studies, and debate explored if there should be an automatic assumption that university leads to a higher paid job upon Graduation.

The agreement within the research did clearly show that there is a direct link between student satisfaction and the experience they have within the institution (DeShields, 2005; Douglas et al, 2006; Kanwar, 2021).

Methodology and Method

Some significant considerations in relation to the student experience have been explored in the literature review of this paper. As such having defined these topics it is important to establish the context of the key factors, ‘student perceptions’ and ‘student expectations’, in relation to the student experience. In order to identify the most appropriate method of data collection for the paper, it was important to define the best approach to apply. It was acknowledged that a qualitative research methodology was the most appropriate technique. Qualitative research stresses the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, it is interested in the process. Whereas quantitative research emphasises measurement and is interested in the relationship between variables (Palinkas et al., 2015). It is identified that there are suitable methods that can be used in qualitative research which include; in-depth interviews and focus group as well as participant observation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Silverman, 2020). Samples sizes should be small and purposeful to give meaningful data that should be used to provide important information and not just because they are representative of a large number of the sample (Sale et al, 2002). The qualitative method is seen to be more flexible and allowing respondents the opportunity to express experiences in their own terms and context (Saunders et al., 2016).

The most appropriate qualitative method identified for this research was the use of semi-structured focus group interviews. The rationale for this was that the researcher was able to use the discussions in the focus groups to examine the literature findings in further detail with student participants. Alongside this, it enabled the researcher to establish focus group participants thoughts and feelings towards the factors that influence their experience within a higher education institution. Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. They are generally loosely structured and encourage interactive discussion between small groups of respondents simultaneously (Kitzinger, 1994; Krueger, 2014). Typically, a focus group will contain from four to eight people, a moderator will lead the group in an in-depth discussion on one or more particular topics in order to explore participants preferences and choices, as they explore why people feel, think or act in a specific manner (Kitzinger, 1994; Cameron, 2005). The rationale to use focus groups for this research was to capture qualitative data via a smaller sample of participants' i.e. undergraduate students at a UK HEI. Furthermore, the rationale for the use of this qualitative data collection technique was to give the researcher the opportunity to discuss and probe key themes in greater detail that was identified in the literature review findings. Focus group interviews are an efficient qualitative method that is used to discover the 'why' behind the 'what' in participant perspectives (Morgan, 1996). The focus group helped the researcher to address and further understand the two key factors, 'student satisfaction' and 'student expectations', identified in influencing the student experience.

The objective of the focus group research was to identify, explore and discuss student participant's opinions on the influences of their university experience. the focus groups were categorised by level of study, encompassing students at years 1, 2 and 3 of their undergraduate degree programme at a UK HEI. To gain a suitable sample for the focus group, the researcher distributed a document asking for volunteers to an appropriate sample population. This being students who were studying on a Business-related programme at a UK HEI, the population group totalled a possible 176 respondents across 3-year groups at the institution. Creswell and Clark (2011) also suggest the importance of acquiring participants who will be willing to openly and honestly share information or 'their views/opinions' and conduct the research in situations where participants are in a comfortable environment.

From this, 24 students showed interest in being part of the focus groups, however, after identifying dates to undertake the interviews this number was confirmed at 17. This number was initially to be 19 with an additional two 3rd year students due to participate but unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances, they were unable to attend. As such the focus group was confirmed as 17 students across the 3 years of undergraduate study, these encompassed 7 students from years 1, 6 students from year 2 and 4 students from year 3. All participants were made up of students from a range of Business and Management programmes within the HEI, see table 1.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Time studied at the HEI	8 Months	16 Months	24 Months
Group size	7	6	4

Table 1 – Focus group participant details

All focus groups took place in April, this month was chosen as it was towards the end of the students second semester of the academic year, thus allowing the researcher the opportunity to identify how key themes had developed over that academic year. The responses of the 17 participants in the focus groups were used to explore in greater depth the opinions and attitudes towards their undergraduate student experience based across their three-year period with the institution. Each participant was coded as shown in table 2 to distinguish between the student contributor and year of study.

Participant	Focus Group - Year 1	Focus Group - Year 2	Focus Group - Year 3
Female 1	F1F1	F2F1	F3F1
Female 2	F1F2	F2F2	
Female 3	F1F3	F2F3	
Female 4	F1F4		
Male 1	F1M1	F2M1	F3M1
Male 2	F1M2	F2M2	F3M2
Male 3	F1M3	F2M3	F3M3

Table 2, Breakdown of focus group participants

The focus group interview themes were derived from key themes raised in the literature review of this paper, see table 3 below.

Focus Group Theme	Theme Driver	Driver Overview	Theorist	Question Themes
Student Perceptions	University increases employability	The consensus that attending an HEI will guarantee / greatly increase the likelihood of gaining employment upon Graduation.	2011; Scutter et al (2011); Tomlinson (2017); Redmehr et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2020	Perceptions versus actual experience Thought process to deciding upon the institution Influencers – friends /teachers/ university Feelings towards university prior to starting Personal motivators for studying
	Students are fully prepared for higher education	Student ‘preparedness’ for HE, influencers were identified as important factors.	Hill et al, (2003); Boyd et al, 2006; Barnes et al (2010); Mah and Ifenthaler (2018)	
	The marketisation of higher education	The notion that students are customers in their university experience	Naidoo, 2003; Brown and Carasso, 2013: Mok and Montgomery, 2021	
Student Expectations	Expectations of the institution	Focus on teaching standards, staff access as well as wider support services	Marshall and Linder (2005); Telford and Masson (2005); Longden, 2006; Lenton (2015); Latif et al., 2019	Staff influence University Facilities Student Engagement Expectations versus actual experience Personal motivators for studying Concept of Value
	Expectations of value	How students value the service they receive from the HEI, e.g. impact of tuition fees on their expectations of value	Jackson et al. (2000); Nilsen (2009); Fredrickson (2012); Dandridge (2018); Teeroovengadum et al., 2019	
	Personal Motivators	Individual influencers on each student, internal and external motivators	Fazey and Fazey (2001); Byrne and Flood (2005); Christie et al., (2006); Hassel and Ridout, 2018	
	Previous Experiences	How past experiences have impacted upon the student’s expectations of their HEI	Hill (1995); Sander et al. (2000); Heikkilä and Lonka (2006); Briggs et al. (2012); Young et al., (2020)	

Table 3, Focus group interview themes and key literature

After the focus groups had taken place, the discussions were written up and analysed through the computer software package NVivo where it was collected, organised and analysed. NVivo is designed to assist in the analysis of qualitative data through recording, sorting, matching and linking key themes in order to gather information to assist in answering the research question (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). The researcher will explore these themes in further detail in the findings and discussions section of this paper.

Findings and Discussion

Findings from the qualitative analysis showed that students derive their experiences based upon their experiences. That is, they make a judgement based upon the actual experience received to define how satisfactory this is to them. The findings from the analysis identified these factors to include 'academic staff influence' and 'feedback given'. Comments from the focus group identified there was an increased expectation upon academic staff in relation to their response to student needs, including feedback, contact time and staff personality.

> *"I think the main thing for me was the teacher and lecturers. How much they would help you and how much time they would give you, whether they would be approachable things like that. That was my main concern…" (F1F2).*

This is interesting and shows that when initially entering higher education students feel that there is a gap in their knowledge as to expectations from the university and perhaps clear information has not been given to them prior to arrival at the institution. Expectations of the teaching experience is a key area identified and as such where expectations do not always match the actual experience received problems may develop (Brinkworth et al., 2009).

The research also identified that staff engagement was a significant influencer upon the university experience and as such is a fundamental part of the student experience delivered. Participants in the focus group expressed a strong emotion that the interaction they had with academic staff within the institution positively or negatively impacted upon their experience.

“Lecturers they are really open, and they give you as much as they can. They support [you]” (F1M2).

“I think that you can talk with your tutor, about the assignment and other points” (F1M1).

“With the support from the teachers. Sometimes when I’m struggling, I can get private time with your tutor to explain how to get things done to get through. So yes, I’m satisfied” (F1F3).

These responses support the concept of tutor support and how it can enhance their academic performance and overall satisfaction within the institution. It has been identified that the most important factor related to learning was if students felt they had received a valuable teaching experience (Marks et al., 2016). Therefore, it could be argued that the university indulges these needs and ensures that student expectations regarding tutor support are met. However as identified by Emery et al. (2001), this could create the wrong culture within the institution whereby academic staff feel pressurised into adopting a ‘customer-orientated’ approach to their role. The quote below shows that expectations of students can rise and as such, it is important that the communication is clear to students in order that standards are met.

“There’s been so many times you’re in a for a 2-hour thing and you get sent away for an hour to do a presentation and you just spend your time listening to other people saying the stuff you’ve just said and not getting anything from the person. ….and then you go into the seminar, they give you a speech for 10 minutes and then send you away you come back and you speak to them. I’d rather get for 2 hours; you are throwing stuff at me” (F2M2).

The dynamics of the student-tutor relationship is paramount to the achievement of a successful ‘working’ relationship but it is also important to ensure there is a leading figure in the relationship, Helms and Key (1994) argues this should be the academic staff member rather than the student. If an academic staff / the university adopt an approach that the ‘student is always right’ this may increase student satisfaction but may increase the notion of students being more entitled to pass their course and receive good grades even if undeserved (Svensson and Wood, 2007). The findings of this research identify that although there are demands made by the students on the institution, there is not a correlation to their expectations on passing the programme. It was identified by students that they believed they were responsible for their own learning and that it was not the obligation of the university to ‘give them’ their degree qualification.

> *“I think customer is probably the wrong term because if you go into a shop and you’re a customer you get stuff done for you. As a student, you’ve got to do so much for yourself. I wouldn’t say customer was the right word” (F3M2).*

> *“You’re the one doing the work whereas when you’re a customer you’re paying someone else to do the work” (FSM1).*

Sharrock (2000) supports these findings and identifies students should not be given their education but instead must actively coproduce it. The role of staff should be to challenge student’s thinking and engage them with the knowledge to assist their learning. Participants identified a range of emotions on their expectations for their programme, several participants offered concern about what to expect, see below. Bui (2002) identifies that students attending HEI for the first time can be underprepared or fearsome of the experience they are about to undertake.

> *“…so many things in my head like what is the teaching style going to be like, what’re the students going to be like? Are the exams going to be hard compared to here [previous institution]? You know all these different things…so there are a lot of you know doubts and uncertainties…” (F1F4).*

> *“I think the main thing for me was the teacher and lecturers. How much they would help you and how much time they would give you, whether they would be approachable things like that. That was my main concern…” (F1F3).*

This is interesting and shows that when initially entering higher education students feel that there is a gap in their knowledge as to expectations from the university and perhaps clear information has not been given in relation to their expectations.

The research findings have also identified the importance of feedback that is given to students from academic staff. The research identified that feedback and tutor comments regarding their studies are important to their learning experience. The expectation of high-quality feedback, therefore, relates to a satisfactory university experience, if the feedback expectation is not met by academic staff then a negative correlation to the overall experience at the institution will be given. This is supported by student comments from the focus groups shown below:

> *"Feedback is very important. Cos if you know what you have done wrong next time you don't do it and you improve the point" (F3M3).*

> *"Last semester, I hadn't got a clue [with an assignment] for a while. I didn't have a problem asking [some lecturers] after class. I'd ask them in class to give a brief answer and give me some good advice which I appreciated." (F1F3).*

> *"The first assignment we handed in we had, we didn't get any feedback and now the next assignment is next week so we would have like the feedback maybe we resubmit our last assignment before we get the feedback. This wasn't very helpful to me…" (F1M1).*

Summary of Findings

In the first year of study within the university, it was recognised that students were seen to have many concerns and uncertainties regarding the experience they were to receive at the institution. The focus group results have shown that students have several drivers that impact upon the student experience within an institution. The two themes identified in this paper have explored influencers that impact upon their first year of study at the university. One such influencer that participants acknowledged was a staff and their approach to teaching. Therefore, the role of staff in managing these apprehensions and creating value becomes critically important, a consistent approach and message will guide students to the service standards delivered by the institution. It was found that an inconsistent approach by the institution can lead to a negative student experience (Kuh et al., 2007; Trowler 2010). This was found to be true in this research where students identified that their experience was defined by their expectations and experiences within the institution.

A final theme that came from the focus groups was that of employability and how this was identified as a significant motivator for students when deciding upon their choice to study at a higher education institution. Students identified that they believed studying at university was imperative when it came to future career prospects upon Graduation. Tomlinson (2008) found that possessing some form of higher education credential was recognised as a key consideration for students as it is a key indicator for their future employability.

> *"I think now it's quite essential to have a degree, to get a decent job. Everyone does so if you don't…" (F2F3).*

> *"Nowadays you have to have a degree. I don't think a degree is essential to succeed, however, it is more difficult to achieve something without a degree" (F2M1).*

> *"I have come to university to get a job when I graduate; I think this is really important for my future" (F1F1).*

Conclusion

It has been identified that the student experience is directly influenced by factors within the institution and that student expectations and satisfaction are impacted by these. This was especially true of their views on engagement with university staff and how this impacted upon their experiences and satisfaction within the institution. As such the ability of the HEI to manage these factors will be of benefit to them, not just in improving the student experience but also in additional benefits such as positive feedback from students, better developed relationships and increased understanding of their students.

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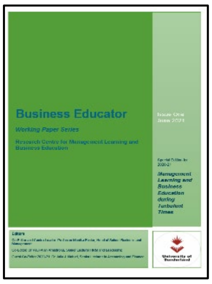

COVID-19 on aviation: Insights on challenges facing the airlines; managing uncertainty, and the potential role of leadership in dealing with a crisis.

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Abstract

Today's COVID-19 situation has devastated the aviation industry, and as a result, airlines have great uncertainty about lower levels of air service, a slowdown in demand, and an unknown return to levels seen before 2020. While an airline's business model is vital for the company's overall success, this model does not just impact short-term results but also long-term survival. As the sector recovers from the recession, implementing the current course of action will have consequences. Even while crises can be destructive to economies and communities, they also offer opportunities for strategic change. This, then, encourages businesses and people to see things differently and even make changes to their thinking that they may not have been prepared to accept what was previously thought to be impossible or impractical. Covid-19 quickly and powerfully depleted the individual's social connections, placed them at risk of losing professional stability, and encouraged their isolation. Team collaboration has a more significant impact during a crisis because team collaboration raises morale, relieves stress, and fosters a sense of unity that helps the employees in the long run.

Keywords:

Uncertainty

Leadership

Strategic management

Response strategies

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Introduction

With more than 1.16 million cases and more than 2.5 million deaths affecting more than 200 countries and most companies (World health organisation, 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the unprecedented global crises of our modern times. There are more than 39.77 million cases in Europe, more than 51.5 million in the US, more than 13.6 in Southeast Asia, 6.6 million in the eastern Mediterranean and more than 2.8 million in Africa (WHO, 2021), making this an actual global pandemic.

The pandemic has had a significant effect on the air transportation industry, which derives its revenue from offering transportation services for passengers and goods. The industry has been affected directly and indirectly by the restrictions on human travel. The COVID-19 pandemic will cost European airlines 76 billion USD in 2020, while Middle East markets would lose 24 billion USD under various COVID-19 evolution scenarios (IATA, 2020). Aviation is one of the first and most visible economic losers of the restrictions placed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, with 95 per cent of passenger flights grounded. These measures include border closures, social isolation, and limits on people who move and travel (Early, 2020). That generated revenue losses of around US $100 billion in 2020 for the industry in the region.

International flights have been dramatically cancelled as a result of travel restrictions imposed from high-risk regions, followed by domestic flight cancellations in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States to prevent the virus from spreading domestically; in the Middle East, industry-wide revenue passenger-kilometres (RPKs) declined in January 2021 after several months with no discernible change. They were 72 per cent lower than January 2019, a more reliable comparison due to the significant traffic shifts in early 2020 (IATA Economy, 2021).

There were 3.5 million fewer passengers in Jordan, resulting in a revenue loss of US $0.7 billion, putting 34,000 jobs at risk and contributing US $1.1 billion to the Jordanian economy (IATA press, 2020). The cancellation of flights has resulted in a direct reduction in air passenger transportation and a significant reduction in foreign and domestic freight transfer. On the demand side, school closures, tourism, and businesses reduced travel demand, and disabled retail markets reduced the supply chain demand, thus weakening the global air transport industry's vitality.

This paper aims to discuss the role of leadership in the global airline industry and the contemporary challenges of introducing new policies in the wake of COVID-19. It is based on a systematic literature review to discuss emerging calls on the impact of COVID-19 as a non-traditional crisis on the aviation industry.

Literature Review

Researchers and decision-makers have become increasingly worried about COVID-19's harmful impact on the business, industry, and the global economy. Despite the plenty of new lines of COVID-19 research and companies being surrounded by the ensuing uncertainties, research into new management and leadership styles, adapting or creating new strategies for emerging risks remains in dearth (Gostin and Wiley, 2020).

The existing literature examines demand risk, financial risk, and other macro risks such as environmental risk, natural disaster risk, political and social risk (Black, 2020). Only a tiny amount of research has been conducted on the impact of such a pandemic on leadership and decision-making. However, there are limited studies that exam considering models in a pandemic situation such as COVID-19, where the effects are global and long-lasting, (e.g. natural disasters), which may be significant because strategic management models, overall, fail to incorporate risk management effectively. COVID-19 is causing uncertainty in a wide variety of countries and sectors. The disturbance is fluid, moving in waves through regions.

Recently, COVID-19 research in the airline sector has taken a toll on stakeholders' demand for the fast response and action planning that is needed. Some investigated popular health-related subjects, whereas others researched domain-specific areas of the aviation industry for airlines. The role of Airlines' actual spread of COVID-19 suggests an elevated risk in 2020 (Wells et al., 2020). The impacts of uncertainty shock on airline jobs studied by Sobieralski (2020). The hardest-hit jobs are those involved with passengers’ in-flight services and in-flight operations.

Motivated by the academic gap in tandem with COVID-19's devastating effects on how businesses work, this paper comes as part of a study that aims to examine the processes of operations, the role of leadership and the strategies adopted in the global airline industry, and outline the contemporary challenges of introducing new policies in the wake of COVID-19. The study is limited to the obstacles inherent in adopting and applying strategies and leadership styles in the global airline industry to achieve this objective.

The study predicted substantive contribution to the literature of strategy and leadership. First, given the increasing global calls for a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on companies, the study will contribute to the current literature by reviewing leadership practices in the global airline industry and analysing the potential challenges facing the leadership ability within the aviation industry, and the short and long-term strategies in the wake of COVID. In the following discussion section, three themes have been evolved based on a systematic literature review; the critical challenges of business practices in the wake of COVID-19; managing risk under uncertainty in the era of COVID-19; strategic management and crisis response.

Discussion

Theme one: Challenges of business practices in the wake of COVID-19

The financial losses resulting from the cancellation of flights and closures at airports are likely to cause many airlines to pursue innovation to survive and succeed. Indeed, the policies of introducing social distancing steps relevant to COVID are likely to influence pricing strategies. Some popular airlines have already adopted such ways of social distancing inflight. For example, airlines such as Royal Jordanian Airlines, Qatar Airways and Emirates have already tried some social distancing elements by not seating middle seated passengers and enabling them to switch seats to resolve their health issues. Furthermore, they decreased in-flight refreshments to minimise interaction between the inflight crew and passengers.

Taken together, these factors are likely to make it challenging to achieve low prices, especially for low-cost airlines competing on high-density seating prices. Legacy airlines such as Emirates and Qatar Airways have historically focused on quality services and access to a massive network. Thus, social distancing inflight may improve customer satisfaction and make it hard to achieve affordable prices (Amankwah et al., 2017).

One of the critical challenges facing industry and companies is that some firms can deprioritise long-term plans, move capital away from the human course, and concentrate on short-term survival (Davis-Peccoud and van den Branden, 2020); policymakers have taken measures to loosen some labour compliance regulations.

The study will contribute to the ongoing discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on the airline industry's governance policies and business practices. The study primarily looks at the difficulties and opportunities of implementing new strategies and leadership styles in a competitive market climate precipitated by COVID-19 instead of the neutral atmosphere where the policies were introduced and implemented. Besides, it will investigate the organisations' practices in the socio-economic climate and identify the impact of such practices on the workforce.

From a practical point of view, the pandemic made standard practices and strategies tougher in the short term for some companies by unleashing operational stresses and threats to companies' survival that restrict managers and firms' ability to respond to such challenges (Davis-Peccoud and van den Branden, 2020). Therefore, COVID-19's effect emphasises strategic collaborations' value in ensuring that operations flow sustains momentum during and after the crisis. Practising airline managers and executives are expected to innovate in methods that provide customers with safe service assurance to mitigate the COVID-19 impact and contribute to sustainable success.

Theme two: Managing risk under uncertainty in the era of COVID-19

The current COVID-19 issue has devastated the aviation industry with uncertainty about reduced availability, insufficient demand, and an unknown return to pre-2020 levels. The pandemic's effect on airlines is an ongoing topic of debate for policymakers, given the industry's substantial economic influence and importance. However, the conversation about the post-stimulus impacts of airline labour is usually an afterthought. The ongoing research will contribute to the policy debates by offering information on the potential consequences of Jordan's current airline labour crisis.

In the definition of risk, uncertainty is significant. The existence of risk necessitates a certain amount of ambiguity. If the emphasis is on the likelihood of the danger arising or its effects, the underlying factor is uncertainty. Although this difference of focus will profoundly impact how risk is handled, any attempt to minimise risk is met with various uncertainties (Baroang et al., 2009; Aven, 2016). To gain insight into unpredictable events, one must follow more comprehensive risk viewpoints, principles, and methods. Risk assessments are often possible. Regardless of data availability, risk can still be conveyed. On the other hand, significant uncertainties make accurate forecasts and decision-making a complex task (Aven and Krohn, 2014; Ruozi and Ferrari, 2013).

Risk is classified into three categories based on its degree of uncertainty: known unknowns, knowable unknowns, and unknowable unknowns. Unknown unknowns: irreducible (not simplifiable) complexity unaffected by additional knowledge; the occurrence will occur, but the date, time, and magnitude of the event are unknown. It is the simplest form of risk to handle because data is frequently available, and experience-based evaluations offer guidance on acceptable levels of contingency (Lemos, 2020).

Unknowns that can be known epistemic (reducible) uncertainty is inherently knowable but unknown due to process/skill failure or a lack of sufficient insight. Via innovative risk detection, discovery, and education, one challenge of successful risk management is transforming as many knowable unknowns into known unknowns as possible. Unknowable unknowns: ontological (by design) uncertainty; the occurrence or result cannot be predicted before it happens. It is not possible to handle something one does not fully understand. As a result, the most destructive uncertainties are the unknowable unknowns (Lemos, 2020).

COVID-19 was not a surprising incident that occurred without warning. Many nations, leaders, and groups have already made pandemic preparations. Infectious diseases were ranked as the top ten risks for the next ten years by the world economic forum (WEF, 2020). As a result, COVID-19 should have come as no surprise. Understanding which group of uncertainty COVID-19 belongs to will help leaders better prepare for or cope with such events.

COVID-19, as an infectious disease was expected, appears to be an occurrence that generates much uncertainty, particularly in terms of knowable unknowns. However, it has become a global disturbance due to a lack of process and expertise and failure or a lack of proper insight. Therefore, the task is to convert as many knowable unknowns as possible into known unknowns. The solution to the problems can be found in risk management, which focuses on two perspectives: immediate response to short-term developments and long-term response through strategic planning to transform the crisis into an opportunity.

Throughout history, the aviation industry has been affected by global crises. The industry has weathered many storms, including the oil embargo, airline deregulation and terrorist attacks (Davies, 2016). airline's success during and after this crisis is also associated with the business model of the airline. The 9/11 attacks resulted in a marked decline in air traffic and airlines struggling to stay operational. As SARS spread followed those events, in 2004, demand only returned to pre-2001 levels (Franke and John, 2011). Low-cost carriers gained market share during this time as significant air carriers struggled to recover as the competition for prices increased (Tan, 2016).

In response to the pandemic, Royal Jordanian Airlines has made some critical changes to their airport service model and in-flight safety measures to ensure a safe operation; for example, they now encourage passengers to check-in online to minimise social interaction at the airport, have installed new self-check-in machines and increased the number of baggage drop-off counters, and have increased the number of they provide local amenities onboard to minimise contact; the crew is qualified to deal with suspicious incidents, and pre-and post-flight disinfection, hygiene, and deep cleaning are improved. Onboard restrooms are sanitised more regularly throughout the flight, passengers are expressly advised to wear face masks during the flight, and economy class passengers receive prepackaged catering. Regarding the crown class, they have planned their catering services to minimise interaction with the crew. Their aircraft are equipped with the most sophisticated air filtration systems available, and their industrial-size HEPA filters eliminate 99.97 per cent of viral and bacterial pollutants from recirculated air.

Less discussed in the literature are shifts in the workers in the sector because of such a crisis. For instance, airlines moved to restructure their operations after COVID-19 to reduce fixed and variable costs. These efforts have been marked by layoffs of workers and labour contract renegotiations; the remaining workers faced pay and benefit reductions that differed depending on their occupation and ranged from 9 to 50 per cent.

The study indicates that if individuals have several 'self-identifiers, which means they have better psychological well-being, social, professional and personal, leading up to self-awareness that serves as a shield against any determinant effect on one's sense of well-being (Lester, 2012). Arguably, without actually providing the support networks to handle it successfully, COVID-19 soon took individuals of personal connections, challenged their professional stability and forced individuals into isolation.

During periods of organisational stress, awareness of the need for authentic leadership and emotional intelligence combined with their already well-managed cognitive and functional intelligence can boost the capacity of managers to solve problems and provide a context that can be accepted by staff who have been unexpectedly pushed beyond their usual operating framework (Tisdall and Zhang, 2020). In a crisis, true team collaboration will enhance workers' integrity, minimise pressure, and foster a sense of harmony that brings long-term positive impacts.

Relatedly, other studies have revealed the role of decision-making power in the crisis response innovation process. It showed, for instance, that firms performed better in the middle of the crisis if more diminutive and more accountable boards controlled them and if they had a more assertive leader with far-reaching space for a manoeuvre (Dowell et al., 2011). More specifically, the study demonstrated that a strong CEO and a small board of directors would allow a company to move faster than competitors without such organisational structures. Importantly, however, this conclusion only seemed to hold for businesses, mainly affected by the crisis.

Theme three: Strategic Management and crisis response

"When a crisis occurs, it usually arrives as a barrage of urgent, unexpected and unpleasant events, allowing little time to organise or plan appropriate responses" (Nathan, 2000, p. 12). An unprecedented situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic means that not only is there little time for coordinating and preparing responses, but traditional strategies for response are often ineffective (Wenzel et al., 2020). The steps currently being taken would have consequences for the sector emerging from the crisis, even after the crisis.

In times of crisis, decisions made now would significantly affect airlines' manoeuvring position and performance in a post-COVID-19 crisis environment. After implementing lockdown steps, the COVID-19 pandemic will change the global aviation industry's competitive environment. Despite clear and understandable immediate and near-unanimous efforts by airlines to reduce cash burn in the revenue-stifling crisis, their strategies varied considerably as the crisis spreads (E.g., Air France – KLM prematurely pulls back its A380 fleet (Dunn, 2021) while Wizz Air plans to extend to new euro countries following the crisis (Reuters, 2021). Airline firms in Jordan should be aware of such circumstances and strategies. Hence, one of the study objectives is to shed light on such strategies that may benefit Jordan's airline industry.

Critical articles which shed light on how airlines respond to crises are published in the Strategic Management Society (SMS) journals; here, the emphasis is on papers that specifically relate to strategic responses to crises in a narrow sense, i.e. crises viewed as sudden, unforeseen, and significantly disruptive by organisations' leaders (Pearson and Clair, 1998). That suggests four strategies for crisis response: retrenchment, preserving, innovation and exit.

Retrenchment is a strategic reaction to a commonly accepted crisis (Bruton, Ahlstrom, and Wan, 2003). This response refers to cost, properties, goods, product lines and overhead reductions (Pearce and Robbins, 1993). Therefore, such strategies effectively limit the reach of the business operations of a company. As previous research indicates, decreasing the market scale by retrenching allows mixed contributions to its turnover. Some researchers find retrenchment to be a significant part of long-term firm recovery since it stabilises declines in performance (Pearce and Robbins, 1994; Robbins and Pearce, 1992). It improves the emphasis on ongoing operations by reducing uncertainty and increasing accountability, thus providing a stable base for strategic renewal (Barker and Duhaime, 1997; Barker and Mone, 1994).

Leaders need to be mindful of the possible loss of synergy effects in times of crisis. However, the lack of synergy impact in the longer run obstructs economies of scale, as management can no longer distribute resources and costs across companies (De Figueiredo, Feldman, and Rawley, 2019). Thus, while in the short term, retrenchment may be partly a requisite or even an inevitable response to the crisis, the long-term feasibility of this solution is far from an argument (Chadwick, Hunter, and Walston, 2004). Particularly when a crisis takes longer continued downsizing may lead to the deterioration of a company's valuable capital, skills, and culture (Ndofor, Vanevenhoven, and Barker, 2013), leading to thinking about an alternative strategy for crisis response.

On the other hand, preserving is about steps intended to continue the commercial operations of an organisation in response to the crisis. Thus, contrary to a restricted range of retrenchment activities, these strategies aim to maintain the market share and reduce the crisis's detrimental consequences (Wenzel, 2015). Previous studies suggest that preserving can be a highly successful strategic response to a crisis (Stieglitz et al., 2016). In particular, in unpredictable situations where businesses face changing circumstances daily, persevering firms may outperform rivals undertaking strategic renewal because − repeated changes in direction weaken the importance of (strategic renewal) and transfer performance gains firmly to inert organisations that maintain the market share (Stieglitz et al., 2016).

Preserving can be an essential strategic response to the crisis, so leaders might be well-advised to initiate strategic renewal too early. The response, however, is ultimately linked to the availability of assets. The likelihood that an organisation will exceed the limits of its available assets and resources as the length of the crisis it is facing increases. As a result, preserving will lead to firm survival's medium-term sustainability, but enforcing this approach will be difficult, if not impossible if the crisis lasts longer.

Although crises can have catastrophic impacts on economies and communities, they also open room for strategic transformation opportunities. So, decide to understand what used to be unthinkable or impracticable (Roy, 2018). In that context, in reaction to a crisis, studies relate to innovation as the realisation of strategic renewal.

Given the resource-based limitations of preserving over time, innovative strategies can be increasingly crucial for maintaining firm survival over the long term if the crisis lasts longer. Nevertheless, managers and workers can make something out of nothing (Nelson, 2005) or understand their assets' flexibility and exploit it (Danneels, 2011). Excess capacity is most likely needed to realise strategic renewal in response to a crisis. As a result, if managers wait too long and spend the company's capital on preserving or retrenchment, the potential scope for strategic renewal will be reduced.

Exit Strategy involves discontinuing an organisation's operations in response to the crisis (Argyres et al., 2015). When the other solutions fail, an exit may be necessary. It can also result from pessimistic decisions, which means leaders discontinue their business because they do not believe that any other approach will help their company survive the crisis (Cornelissen et al. 2020).

Exits can be an essential cornerstone for strategic renewal (Ren, Hu, and Cui, 2019), as they unlock dedicated capital and thus lead to new projects being created (Carnahan, 2017). Thus, while exits are not cost-free (Moulton and Thomas, 1993) and potentially leave a failed business's reputation (Xia et al., 2016), such responses may not simply be the end of the path.

The impact of the pandemic on airlines is a point of contention for policymakers, considering the industry's enormous economic clout and significance. Numerous countries, officials, and organisations have already begun making pandemic plans. Even the world economic forum rated infectious diseases as one of the top ten threats for the next decade. Understanding which group of uncertainty COVID-19 pandemic belongs will assist leaders in better preparing for, or coping with, such incidents.

Global crises throughout history have impacted the aviation industry. COVID-19 erupted into a global crisis as a result of a lack of mechanisms and experience. During and after a crisis, the success of an airline is also dependent on the airline's business model. True team collaboration during a crisis strengthens employees' dignity, alleviates pressure, and fosters a sense of unity with long-term beneficial effects.

Financial losses resulting from flight cancellations and airport closures are likely to drive many airlines to innovate to survive and thrive. Inflight social distancing can increase customer satisfaction while making it more difficult to maintain affordable prices. Practising airline managers and executives are forced to innovate to minimise the COVID-19 effect and contribute to the airline's long-term success.

The COVID-19 pandemic containment measures alter the competitive environment of the global aviation industry. Jordanian airline companies should be cognizant of such situations and strategies. Leaders must be cognizant of the possibility of losing synergy effects during times of crisis.

While retrenchment may be a necessary or even unavoidable response to the crisis in the short term, the authors argue that its long-term viability is far from certain. The new course of action will have ramifications for the sector when it emerges from the crisis. Airlines should consider how to respond to crises that could favour Jordan's airline industry. Continued downsizing could result in the degradation of critical capital, skills, and culture. Preserving has been shown in previous research to be a highly effective strategic response to a crisis. Excess capacity is almost certainly needed to carry out strategic renewal in the aftermath of the crisis.

Managers who delay and waste the company's money on preserving or retrenchment reduce strategic renewal opportunities. Although crises can have devastating consequences for economies and societies, they also provide opportunities for strategic change. Therefore, resolve to comprehend what was previously impossible or impractical.

Conclusion

Exit strategies will serve as a critical pillar of strategic renewal. They mobilise committed resources, resulting in the development of new ventures. Though exits are not accessible and may harm the image of a failed company, such responses may not be the end of the road. Given the presence and severity of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, more research is required in times of crisis for strategy building. Specifically, while uncertainty in many strategic management theories has fallen out of favour (Alvarez et al., 2018), that is an integral part of crisis responses. Therefore, one study explores the internal and external enablers and disablers that drive managers and employees to react appropriately to the contextual factors triggered by crises.

The relative importance of strategic crisis responses based on different time horizons points to temporal differences in the crisis response phase. That is, at some points in time, one response may be superior to another, and following some of the strategic responses to the crisis may be too early or too late (Kunisch et al., 2017). For this purpose, future research is required to explore the role of time and temporality in reacting more deeply to the crisis.

Strategic crisis responses are not unrelated; that is, one possible response may be a necessary first step to another. While past studies point partially in this direction, the dynamics of shifting between strategic responses are little known (Fallon and Kakabadse, 2009). As a result, it is necessary to investigate the sequential patterns of responses and the underlying mechanisms that are more or less successful in resolving crises.

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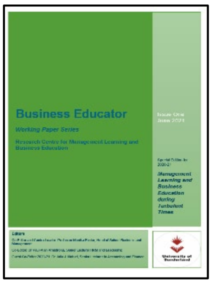

Professional identity: Concept and formation

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Abstract

In spite of the frequent use of the term Professional Identity, it is hardly differentiated from other related concepts such as work attitudes, professional behaviour and professionalism.

Accordingly, this paper will represent an attempt to: (1) identify different definitions and attempt/ to conceptualise the terms, (2) to explore how professional identity is shaped by work attitudes, behaviour and beliefs etc. (3) to examine the formation of professional identity in relation to personal, social and cultural influences.

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Introduction

This paper explores the conceptual and theoretical framework of professional identity and highlights how it has been looked at from different viewpoints, particularly by sociologists. The paper will also examine the process of formation of professional identity and the key elements that influence its construction by looking at the different approaches and orientations and will suggest an alternative approach to give further insight into the concept.

Literature Review

Professional identity has received a lot of attention in recent years. In general, sociologists have regarded professional identity as a dynamic component and a necessary foundation of professionalism as suggested by Schmidt and Crossley (2009) in addition to, Slinger and Roghr (2012) who expressed the same view. Likewise, professions and professionalism attempt to define or elucidate the nature of Professional identity and vary even within a single professional group. A basic definition was produced by Slay and Smith (2010) who defined professional identity as one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, and experience. Floyd (2012), Volpe and Hopkins (2010), Joshua and Lammers (2014) all shared the same view that Professional Identity is multi-dimensional and constitutes of many different identities or sub-identities (e.g., personal and social identities)

Caza (2015) suggested that professional identity or work-based identity is shaped by work attitudes, attributes, beliefs and consequently affects behaviour in each situation whilst professional identity enables individuals to assign meaning to themselves and attached to them by others. Neary (2014) insinuated that the concept describes how we perceive ourselves within our occupational context and how we communicate this to others. Neary furthered his view by suggesting that professional identity is underpinned by a professional association, body of knowledge, rationally recognised qualification, and social recognition.

In general, this view ignored the role of personal belief and values, or how beliefs influence and support professional values as well as the impact of that on professional identity formation. Caza and Neary's perspectives showed that professional identity is not only a professionals' image of who they are but also, what they want to be. Both researchers pointed out an important element of defining professional identity which is the social aspect of the concept related to role expectation and perception and how professionals see themselves in the eyes of others.

Further to the above views, Phillips and Dalgrano (2017) both announced that professional identity is not a stable entity and evolves according to changes in social norms. Daniel and Slinger (2012), concluded with the same assumption and argued that the formation of professional identity happens at two levels. First, a collective level, which involves the socialisation of a person into appropriate roles and forms of participation in the work's community. Second, identity formation at an individual level involves the development of the personnel.

Referring to the above statement, the formation of professional identity seems to be a central issue in the sociology of professionalism, with most of the literature agreeing that this formation is evolving and an ongoing process. Webb (2015), Roghr, Sligar (2012) and Mery (2010) all described it as more interactive than a relatively straightforward process. Webb (2015) stated that professional identity is not stable, it is an ongoing process of interpretation and customisation which is shaped by contextual workplace factors. Swennen, Jones and Volman (2010) all shared the same point of view that professional identity is interactive and problematic and does not come as ready-made and is continually developing along the way of professional and organisational life thus, professional identity is a process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experience.

Based on the above views, it is evident that there is consent among researchers that professional identity is continuously evolving and developing. However other researchers such as Joynes (2018) on the other hand claimed that professional identity develops mainly through socialisation into a profession and exposure to professional behaviour and interaction in real-world situations, and this can be strongly opposed by arguing that identity formation can be influenced by other factors not directly related to a work/profession setting environment such as personal beliefs, inner value, social background etc. That being so, this literature mainly focused on the construction and factors that contribute to constructing and developing professional identity. However, the same literature does not adequately answer some related questions such as the role of socialisation, professional training and the interaction with other professionals within a profession, not only in terms of constructing professional identity but also in upholding and maintaining a stable professional identity.

Methodology and Method

As the objective of this paper is to explore the existing knowledge of Professional Identity and suggest an alternative approach of conceptualising the term, scoping literature review was conducted to, (1) identify a research gap and the unexplored aspects of the topic, (2) to suggest a different approach for further research.

Discussion

A new approach to conceptualise the term

In line with all these different attempts to conceptualise the term professional identity, it might be suggested that professional identity can also be defined and understood as a social state of mind'. This new approach or perspective of professional identity will provide an insight into a professional identity that is based on two basic assumptions illustrated separately in most previous studies.

The first assumption is the ''Self'' and the second assumption is the ''Scio-dynamic'' nature of the term. These two inter-related components of professional identity appeared when professional identity was discussed in sociology and the medical field. For instance, Murdoch and Crossley (2015) who focused on building a model of professional identity formation concluded that the self-perception of professional is a key element in forming professional identity. In other words, this formation of one self's professional identity is a person or an internal process by which individual professionals modify and develop their behaviour to accept the responsibilities and obligations of the professional role. Similarly, Muller (2006) in his study of aspects of professional identity, referred to the natural connection between the ’self’ and ’personality’ and recommended integrating them in an attempt to define the term.

Based on this, Muller designed a personality model in which he claimed that professional identity is shaped by ‘’The big five’’ personality characteristics as a limited personal trait that forms identity, and these are openness to new experiences, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and extraversion (see; Cobb-Clark and Schurer (2011) and their discussion on the stability and consistency of the Big five personality traits. In the same vein, Crocett and Mees (2008) revealed in their identity formation model that the Big Five personality dimensions of extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness along with emotional stability are intertwined in the process of identity formation, with in-depth self-exploration, commitment and reconsideration of commitment, this will intensive the formation. Although Muller, Crocett and Mees discourse highlighted an important aspect of professional identity which is the personal trait as well as partially addressing the identity question of Who am I? Limiting professional identity mostly in ’oneself’ or personal qualities appear to be a narrow perspective that attempts to understand professional identity formation based only on the pre-exited personal traits and rule out other active ingredients that form identity. These other active ingredients were highlighted by other researchers such as Liegh (2019) who asserted that professional identity is not just an interpretation of personal traits or who we are, but also, provides insights into elements of the environment that affect a professional’s experience where identity construction is seen as a negotiation with both self and others and within the discourses present in one's life. This point is furthered by Mancini and Tonarelli (2015) when they argued that professional identity includes both personal and social dimension, they also attempted to provide evidence of the relationship between what they called Inter-group and Inter-individual processes through work value, professionals’ behavioural involvement and professionals’ emotional adjustment.

In summary, the views of Muller and Crocett did not provide answers to questions that closely related to the Big five characteristics for instance. Are these traits fixed or changeable over time? What are the impacts of the change -if occurred on the stability of one's professional identity? Are there any other non-personal traits that may influence and contribute to identity formation? Having in mind that some researchers cited other traits and described them being necessary facets of professional identity, these traits were mentioned by Fletcher and Dashper (2019) who include notions such as; autonomy, peer review, critical self-evaluation and professional judgement. Additionally, are these Big five traits measurable? Even so, does Personality tests, which are widely used as a tool to measure The Big five can be used to measure professional identity on a collective level? Although most literature lacked addressing these issues, it is understandable that this can be due to the difficulties in identifying an appropriate tool or a method of measuring the concept aside from the ones in the medical field such as the self-evaluation and even this method can only be implemented on an individual level, not on a collective level (e.g. measuring the shared identity).

The second assumption and the foundation of this suggested approach is the 'Socio-dynamic' nature of the professional identity which based on the argument that professional identity is mainly of a social nature. This view can be promoted by the previous work of Fricke (2010) who saw the identity as a social construct, defined and given value only when evaluated in terms relative to a specific cultural context.

Thus, professional individuals classify their place in the world based on their membership of a collective group, during which individuals influenced more by the categorisations of others rather than their own cognitions and emotions. (see; Godlie (2012) and her study of the formation of professional identity in medical students which published in Medical Teachers' Journal. Relatedly, Evetts and Aldridge (2003) described professional identity as a work-inflected phenomenon that is distinctly structured by work contexts. Once again, Evetts and Aldridge devoted their efforts to outline only one aspect of the professional identity which demonstrated that the concept can often be best understood in relation to the inter-group processes and inter-group relations.

Conclusion

Comment on previous efforts to conceptualise professional identity:

To conclude, some academics attempts in examining professional identity took two different approaches. The first approach was much concerned with the formation of professional identity and overemphasised the components of the professional identity (see, Lane (2018), Daniel and Slinger Webb (2015). Therefore, most of the literature highlighted the same conceptual confusion likewise professions, in defining and understanding what professional identity is. It means different things to different professionals within different professions.

Added to, by having previous literature approached professional identity this way, it helped to overlook how professionals balance between their personal identity components such as inherited traits, values, culture and beliefs and their work identity, as well as how this will impact their professional decision-making in given situations.

In the second approach, much of research has focused on self-identification and how professionals self-define themselves in relation to their professions, and here it can be said that professional identity in its root is a personal identity that is mostly shaped by organisations' culture, values and ethics as well as, through professionals' social engagement with colleagues in a professional work environment. To illustrate this, the concept can be best described as a self-controlled situational human behaviour or a state of mind that can be interpreted into actions, attitudes and influenced by a certain social atmosphere in a work context.

Further to the above, the current wave of Covid-19 spread has shed new light on the understanding of professional Identity - as well as many professional practices- on both micro-level and macro-level for instance, the closure of school, universities and colleges will impact directly the identity and behaviour of teaching professionals either positively or negatively, as some identity component might be affected such as their own personal perception to the work-setting environments procedures, their attitudes towards virtual learning methods, the absence of the group cultures, and their ability and readiness to monitor their own performance by identifying their learning and training gaps and needs. Another example of that is in the medical field as the possibility of professional Identity conflict can be present particularly, when we have to closely consider how the current Covid-19 pandemic required different professions to work collaboratively both at the micro and macro level.

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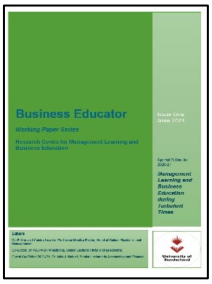

Letters of praxis: A metaphorical journey through the challenges for business and management education during turbulent times.

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Abstract

This paper presents a reflexive dialogic collaborative auto ethnographic lifeography of the challenges facing a Business School during the Covid-19 global pandemic. This lifeography is in the form of letters between a Head of School who coordinated the effort and a Digital Learning and Teaching Lead (DLTL) who have reacted, supported and designed strategic and operational practices in response to the challenges facing the School since the change to online delivery in March 2020. This has informed the transition to hybrid delivery in September 2020. These challenges have included; upskilling of digital skills for staff and learners; developing online delivery through instructional design; dealing with digital poverty, anxiety and apprehension; the diverse range of learner needs at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral stages; the support for commuter home students and international students. This reflexive conversation draws out the challenges from the perspective of a Head of School concerned with the wellbeing of staff and students and ensuring the consistency of experience for diverse groups of students, and a DLTL supporting this transition to hybrid delivery. This conversation also explored identity and pedagogy which informed the strategies and interventions used to support staff and learners within the School of Business and Management.

Keywords:

Reflexive dialogic

Lifeography

Hybrid delivery

Digital upskilling

Identity

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Introduction

The impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic on higher education cannot be underestimated. This paper presents a conversation in the form of letters between a Head of a School of Business and Management and a Senior Lecturer in HRM and Leadership who became the Digital Learning and Teaching Lead. The global pandemic took hold in March 2020 and HEIs like all parts of society had to change the way they function overnight. HEIs closed campuses and shifted learning online and this was a significant cultural shift which presented numerous challenges. Through the letters, this lifeography (Janesick, 2019) presents a reflexive account of the challenges facing the School of Business and Management in this paradigm shifting approach to delivering the pedagogy of their learners.

The use of letters as a reflexive account gives an insight into the strategic decisions made by the University, the Faculty and the School Management Team, plus the account of an experienced teacher who applied and was appointed the Digital Learning and Teaching Lead.

Literature Review

The global pandemic COVID-19 has changed the landscape of Higher Education and how HEIs operate as places and space for learning. In March 2020 delivery of learning went solely online and this caused anxiety, apprehension and challenges for students, teaching staff, university support services and university management at all levels. One of these challenges was translating and transferring the performative art of teaching to online spaces using VLEs and learning technology tools (for example, big blue button and later in the transition Microsoft teams). This digital transformation of higher education is not new (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). The process required strategic oversight in terms of trust through collaborative and organizational knowledge of digital and online learning (Cameron and Green, 2019).

This digital transformation is required to be contextualised as online learning which is the use of technological devices, learning technology tools (LTIs) and the internet (Means *et al,* 2009; Tallent-Runnels et al, 2006; Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). The online learning experience is framed around the interaction of the teacher with the virtual learning environment (VLE). It has been suggested by Farrelly, Costello and Doolon (2020) the following metaphors describe the types of VLEs; *the straitjacket, the behemoth, the digital carpark, the safe space, the smorgasbord and the pathfinder*. We argue these metaphors can be used to describe the interactions of staff with online learning and the challenges they have faced in this new landscape of designing online pedagogic practices.

We proposed the '*straitjacket*' is the teacher who sees the VLE as a fixed storage device which cannot be used for interactive and performative teaching, therefore leading to resistance and they seek reassurance the 'old ways' will return post pandemic. The *'behemoth'* is a teacher who see the limitations of the VLE due to the offering of learning technology tools (LTIs) available where they have no choice of what they use in their pedagogic design. The '*Digital Carpark'* teacher see the VLE as a storage bin and like the *'straitjacket'* do not see potential for interaction and engagement, they view engagement as verbal interaction and expect the material within the VLE to be for convenience. The *'Safe Space'* teacher adopts interactive approaches within the VLE including their choice of communication and collaborative tools which cannot replace the performative nature of teaching face to face, however, they design pedagogy which is framed around online discussions, debates and interactions using the LTI tools available. The '*Smorgasbord'* teacher recognises and embrace the variety of functionality which a VLE offers. These teachers are agile in their pedagogic design and responsive to different learner needs so design online delivery to take into account a range of learner needs rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. Finally, the *'Pathfinder'* teacher is aware of the future developments of online learning, the potential for VLEs to change and reshape pedagogic practice and curriculum design.

The metaphorical conceptualisation of teacher interaction with online learning pedagogy has allowed for understanding and consideration for the challenges during these turbulent times and brought to the 'surface' the support, guidance and change in ways of working for teachers in HEI. These challenges have been met with anxiety, apprehension and uncertainty. We suggest this is a pedagogic challenge as teachers within HEIs are familiar, comfortable and 'used' to face to face classroom settings for teaching where the teacher and the learner can observe non-verbal cues and body language (Nambiar, 2020, p784). This is one of the main challenges as this is difficult to replicate online through interactions with learners who are apprehensive and demonstrate this by not turning on their cameras or speaking to the teacher. They will 'talk' and interact using the chat function however this has to be taken into the type of learner (age, nationality, experience of higher education, personality, motivation to study).

This should also be considered in terms of inclusion and the challenges for learners with invisible and unseen disabilities (Barkas, Armstrong and Bishop, 2020) or learners who join the education through diverse paths (Foster, Mulroy and Carver, 2020) as they absorb explicit knowledge and tacit skills (Barkas and Armstrong, forthcoming). This should also take into account 'Place' (Nobari and Armstrong, 2020), the value of learner relationships in the internationalisation of Higher Education (Killick and Foster, 2021) and the empowering nature of cross-cultural relationships in both face to face and online diverse settings (Foster, 2017).

We propose and recognise the challenges facing teachers in HEIs moving from a physical classroom on campus where their craft and art of performance as a teacher is accessible to a virtual online learning space.

We consider these in the support which can be provided for this digital transformation of pedagogy from a strategic perspective led by a Head of School and the operational support provided by a Digital Learning and Teaching Lead.

Methodology and Method

This study was framed within a critical qualitative inquiry (Denzin, 2017) as a lifeography (Janesik, 2019). This qualitative interpretation of reflexive accounts allowed for agency and voice of the authors as they through a collaborative autoethnographic approach (Blalock and Akehi, 2017) expressed their perceptions and perspectives of their position of managing the digital transformation of online learning as a reaction to Covid-19 global pandemic.

The conversations were in the form of letters of praxis (Janesick, 2019) as this gave us ontological permission to reflect on and consider how our roles were impacted by the covid-19 pandemic and how we responded to the challenges. These letters expressed the practical wisdom and dialectics (Eikeland, 2012) of the authors. Table 1 below outlines the purpose of these letters of praxis:

Letter	Author	Purpose
1	DLTL	The 1st letter was a reflection from the DLTL in terms of their perspective and perception of the challenges facing staff with the School of Business and Management.
2	Head of School	The 2nd letter was a response to the 1st letter and this provided the strategic and managerial insights of the Head of School.
3	DLTL	The 3rd letter was a reflection by the DLTL taking into account practical wisdom and dialectics
4	Head of School	The 4th and final letter was a reflection from the Head of School in terms of strategic support for hybrid delivery.

Table 1: Letters of Praxis Purpose

This has been framed as a metaphorical account as the letters act as a device for reflexive dialogue and discussion as a critical incident analysis (Ripamonti et al, 2016). This is conceptualised as the '*teacher interaction with online learning delivery'*. Within the analysis, we position ourselves within our distinct organisational roles (Head of School; Digital Learning and Teaching Lead), so this provides the ontological position of this study. These challenges for teachers are framed using the metaphorical conceptualisation, see Table 2 below:

Metaphorical Representation	Description	Located
Straitjacket	A teacher who sees the VLE as a fixed storage device which cannot be used for interactive and performative teaching, therefore leading to resistance and they seek reassurance the 'old ways will return post pandemic.	Letters 1 and 2
Behemoth	A teacher who see the limitations of the VLE due to the offering of learning technology tools (LTIs) available where they have no choice of what they use in their pedagogic design.	Letters 1 and 2
Digital Carpark	A teacher sees the VLE as a storage bin and like the *'straitjacket'* does not see the potential for interaction and engagement, they view engagement as verbal interaction and expect the material within the VLE to be for convenience.	Letters 1 and 2
Safe Space	A teacher who adopts interactive approaches within the VLE including their choice of communication and collaborative tools which cannot replace the performative nature of teaching face to face, however, they design pedagogy which is framed around online discussions, debates and interactions using the LTI tools available.	Letters 1,2 and 3
Smorgasbord	A teacher who recognises and embraces the variety of functionality which a VLE offers. These teachers are agile in their pedagogic design and responsive to different learner needs so design online delivery to take into account a range of learner needs rather than a 'one size fits all approach.	Letters 3 and 4
Pathfinder'	A teacher is aware of the future developments of online learning, the potential for VLEs to change and reshape pedagogic practice and curriculum design.	Letters 3 and 4

Table 2: Metaphorical Representation and Analytical Frame for the Study

We recognise and appreciate the 'subjective' nature of the letters, they have been written through the lens of the authors and as these are framed within a critical qualitative inquiry (Denzin, 2017) they are not intended to be an account of the experiences of everyone who works with an HEI. They are intended to present the perspectives of two actors who have found themselves with distinct roles and challenges of digital transformation by moving online during the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Findings

Background to Study

The context for this study is based on the acceleration of digital transformation within the School of Business and Management due to Covid-19. Before Covid-19 the learning and teaching approaches were mainly face to face through lectures, workshops and seminars (as synchronous learning where the learners could receive feedback 'live'). The virtual learning environment (VLE) Canvas was used in a range of ways to support the face to face teaching sessions. There were examples of digital learning where colleagues had adapted innovative and creative methods of using digital in their pedagogy. In March 2020 the learning and teaching landscape changed which included a change in the language of learning; online learning instead of face to face; asynchronous (learning happened at a pace suitable for the learner and this was facilitated by online approaches and especially the use of the VLE) and synchronous learning; hybrid learning (mixture of traditional face to face and online); instructional and content design; storyboards for learning design. There were numerous challenges for the School and the teaching staff, and this are reflected in the lifeography. These acted as reflexive accounts is in the form of four letters of praxis between the Head of School of Business and Management and the Digital Teaching and Learning Lead.

Letter 1: Straitjackets, Behemoths, Digital Carparks and Safe Spaces (Part 1)

Dear Monika,

I reflect back on moving online in March 2020, it was chaotic and stressful, however, once I decided how I was going to support the students on my module it became clearer. As I delivered a postgraduate module online in the summer, I was able to experiment and practice instructional design, this was also supported by my links with The HEP project.

During this time, I was notified I was appointed as Digital Learning and Teaching Lead (DLTL). The role was due to start in September 2020; however, I attended the DLTL meetings every two weeks before I started my annual leave. This group started to discuss how we could support our colleagues. There were also priorities from the School Leadership Team (SLT).

It was not entirely clear what this role was meant to be. this confusion did present challenges. I wanted to move ahead and start to make sense of the role, as well as developing my online pedagogic practice for semester 1 for 2020-21.

Once objectives were agreed and with looking back, reflecting on what worked due to experimentation and practise I was able to explore how online delivery could enhance the learning experience of my students.

As DLTL I have faced challenges which include;

- *the range of digital skills of colleagues*
- *Setting boundaries for this role*
- *Exploring how to support colleagues*
- *Recognising anxiety, apprehension from students and colleagues*
- *Recognising the range of digital poverty which existed for our learners*

As we approach the end of semester 1, I am starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel, this transformational learning at a personal, and organisational level is started to take shape.

So, as I move forward with my role, I ask what would you like the DLTL to do for the School of Business and Management to support online learning?

Yours sincerely

Paul-Alan

Letter 2: Straitjackets, Behemoths, Digital Carparks and Safe Space (Part 2)

Dear Paul-Alan

Thank you for the letter and your reflections on our transition to online and your role as DLTL.

My reflections on the early days of the transition are that as a Head of School my main concern first was to provide support especially wellbeing and pastoral support to students and staff to face the immediate challenges of such a big change in how we interact, how we engage with the students.

There was a sense of the team coming together very quickly to support one another and so we have gradually moved from chaos and unknown to taking each day and each week together, supporting one another. The main priority for me as the Head and for all Colleagues has been student experience, to ensure it is as good as we can offer with the change to online not affecting it, perhaps even enabling it to be better. My second priority was and remains to this day to ensure we look after our staff; we support them and look after their wellbeing.

Gradually we have moved from the short term, just to get on top of the chaos and to be in control, to the longer term starting to plan ahead, using lessons learned and providing training and support to prepare for the longer-term solutions online.

When the role of DLTL was created, I was delighted that you have applied, as I was aware about your expertise online but also how respected you are amongst colleagues and how well you work with the team. This role appointed to 'one of us' who knows the team, strengths and weaknesses, was a very good move.

The objectives we have agreed fitted very well with our immediate needs and also looking forward. However, the pandemic has meant we have to constantly review and evaluate our priorities as they change based on the external factors. I think you have developed your objectives very well. your guidance and expertise were well appreciated by the Colleagues.

Yes, I agree there have been challenges for the DLTL role as for everyone in this very fast-moving transition to online whilst constantly facing the unknown and new developments. I would say the challenges you have faced are still with us and we have to work together to address them where we can. But we have also learned an awful lot, from the initial appetite for all things online and your assistance required a lot, to Colleagues now picking up more and more skills and also starting to get used to how the relationship with DLTL should work i.e. you provide guidance and advice *not a 1:1 tutoring function and that Colleagues need to take some responsibility for their own development needs by engaging with the available solutions and training.*

Going forward, I think we need to continue to support Colleagues as you have done first of all by being a point of contact, sometimes to help with a solution or sometimes to remind Colleagues where to find a solution. Beyond online, we are going to be working on the Curriculum Transformation implementation in semester 2 which has an aspiration to include digital in all modules and programmes. The new Director for Digital First in the University will be our excellent contact for this, but I also hope you can assist Colleagues working on the modules how to include this either as a skill, as a topic to explore in relation to the subject etc. Finally, we also need your support to develop the new modules using the ID approach.

I hope this helps point you in the right direction but happy to discuss this further. Thank you again for all your hard work supporting the School and looking forward to further work together.

Best wishes

Monika

Letter 3: Safe Spaces, Smorgasbords and Pathfinders

Dear Monika,

As we move towards the end of semester one and we consider the challenges ahead there are still challenges for the School, the DLTL and all colleagues. We have learnt a great deal and have made significant changes to the way we teach, deliver our material and interact with our learners. There is still a sense of apprehension as we start to grapple with this new way of delivery.

There have been the early adopters who have embraced this change and found ways of making it work for them; there have been the experienced teachers who have grappled with technology and with support have found ways which they are comfortable with; and the final group are the guardians of the old ways who have been professional, supported their learners and have been looking forward to the way it was before the global pandemic.

The DLTL is in an unusual situation as they are an early adopter and they have objectives to fulfil, however they are not part of the existing structures, processes and practices of the University. This does present challenges! I know there are discussions ongoing about the role of DLTL and how this can support instructional design of curriculum, modules and programmes and looking beyond 2020-21. There has been digital transformation and numerous examples of 'good online learning design'. We still have challenges in support the learner who is isolated and does not have the digital skills, software and hardware to be able to interact with the online delivery. Was also have challenges with the upskilling of teachers and the routines we have developed since March 2020.

The use of instructional design (ID) will frame and support this and can be translated and transfer to transform blended learning, hybrid learning and online learning. It is the role of the DLTL to work in partnership and collaborate with Instructional and Content Designers and act as a pathfinder for their colleagues. We need to make sure we continue to share practice and share ideas from the DLTL group within the members of the School. We need to co construct meaning with the learners and appreciate there is not one way of delivering our teaching material.

We still need to support those colleagues who are apprehensive and provide opportunities for development and bespoke pedagogic design within a culture of inclusivity for all learners.

There is so much potential for technology enabled learning which offers agility for the teacher and the learner, it represents the characteristics of the commuter student, those from a widening participation background, international backgrounds and mature students. However, we have to be mindful of the barriers including;

- *Need for experiential learning and practice which is difficult to translate the tacit skills developments online*
- *Need for social learning and cohesion which is more difficult to translate online*
- *Recognition of a diverse range of digital skills from learners and teachers*
- *Access to software, broadband, study space, hardware and online learning familiarity which can be impacted by digital poverty*
- *Space and time to design and develop online learning pedagogies*

I look forward to reflecting on the successes and the areas for development from semester 1 as we move into semester 2 and beyond 2020-21.

Yours sincerely

Paul-Alan

Letter 4: Smorgasbords and Pathfinders

Dear Paul-Alan

You have captured so well the spectrum of change and the journey we are on as a School and as a group of individuals, each with a single story, but together being a strong team, supporting one another for success.

I couldn't agree more that we are not there yet, our journey continues into the new year 2021 but we are so much stronger, we have learned about the digital spaces as enablers to learning and we have also searched hard and found so much strength in the team. With your lead as DLTL joined by the Instructional Designers joining the School, I am optimistic that our learning will continue but now in a more structured way, our path clearer with the Instructional Design now embedded in what we do, our tools tried and tested and our skillset so much more prepared to face the challenges of the online and hybrid delivery. Our students too now have developed the skills and confidence to engage with us in the blended learning spaces. They still face many barriers and challenges, but I am confident we are well equipped to support them to become confident navigators of the digital learning spaces.

I wish to thank you for your support for Colleagues and students, guiding us in the labyrinth of new skills and spaces, the early days of unchartered waters and then moving to feeling safer and more confident, we couldn't have done it without your guidance! I look forward to working together in the months to come to ensure our students have a fulfilling experience and that we draw on each other strengths to help support it.

With best wishes

Monika

Discussion

The accelerated pace of digital transformation in the guise of online learning, hybrid learning due to the Covid-19 global pandemic should not be underestimated. This new labyrinth of learning has presented challenges for the un-learning and re-learning of routines for both learners (students) and the teachers. This interaction of the teacher with online learning pedagogic practice, curriculum development and instructional design has been presented in this paper as a metaphorical epistemological journey through the liminal space of co construction of meaning between a Head of School and a Digital Learning and Teaching Lead.

The letters of praxis have illuminated this co construction of meaning as the authors have identified the unlearning and relearning required for digital transformation;

Unlearning for Straitjackets, Behemoths and Digital Carparks

The challenges for digital transformation have the cultural and paradigm shift within HEIs. The challenges to be responsive, upskill, reskill and deal with the complexity and messiness of digital transformation in the form of online and or hybrid learning. Changing routines is required to transform using digital platforms (including a VLE) and the tools located within the VLE. The Covid-19 global pandemic has quickened the digital transformation process which has impacted on the teacher. The confusion, anxiety, overwhelming feelings of this transformation cannot be underestimated. To move away from being straitjackets, behemoths and digital carparks requires un-learning and this requires the School community to come together with the support at managerial levels and through change agents (role modelling, for example, a Digital Learning and Teaching Lead) through conversations, staff development, drawing expertise from instructional designers, content designers and learning technologists.

Un-learning will only happen if teachers are supported in this digital transformation landscape. There is a need to recognise the human in this shift towards online and hybrid blended approaches. The concern with the wellbeing of teachers at the frontline of the transformation continues to be a primary concern.

Unlearning and relearning for Safe Spaces and Smorgasbords

This digital transformation requires space, support and time and this is difficult as teachers are reacting to every changing landscape. Practice sharing, working as communities of practice, being open is how teachers can relearn and develop pedagogic practice and practises. The reflexive approach to pedagogic design and through communication and conversations with the learners as a collaborative approach can overcome some of the challenge's teachers face.

The learners we interact with have their own challenges including digital poverty, caring and work responsibilities. This adds to the digital transformation landscape both at regional, national and international levels. Inclusive pedagogic approaches are also part of this digital transformation landscape and this will require staff development, managerial support, support from experts in online learning design.

Re-learning and lead by Pathfinders

The lived experience of teachers during this digital transformation during a global pandemic cannot be a short-term reaction, we should be aiming to be pathfinders and be proactive in developing online, blended technology enabled pedagogic practices. The global pandemic has hastened this digital transformation and there are still challenges including replicated informal social space which happens in physical classrooms and on campus. This is an existing challenge and pathfinders will explore how technology can provide safe social learning spaces to replicate informal parts of university life.

Conclusion

This paper presented a small scale critical qualitative inquiry as a reflexive dialogic collaborative auto ethnographic lifeography in the form of letters. These letters aimed to draw out the perspectives of a Head of School and a Digital Learning and Teaching Lead. We are not generalising these letters, we are presenting this as lived experience as qualitative observation, interpretation of lived experience.

We framed this as a metaphorical representation of teacher interactions with virtual learning environments to suggest the range of digital transformations at individual level and as a School community. This included personal reflections as insights and challenges this learning community are facing during this global pandemic. It also presents a framework for future discourse and debate as we make our ways through the digital transformation landscapes as we unlearn, relearn and upskills and reskill online and hybrid blended approaches which will become part of the fabric of HEIs beyond the global pandemic.

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Professor Monika Foster (ORCID ID: 000-002-224-1003) is the Head of School, Business and Management, working with students as partners, Monika has had a transformational impact on student experience including enhanced transitions for mature and international students in the UK, and the development of internationalized curriculum in the UK and internationally. Monika's external profile includes the award of Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, an advisory role with HEA to develop a national Framework for Internationalisation, and a title of Visiting Professor from the Shandong University of Finance, People's Republic of China. Monika's research interests lie in cross-cultural management, employability, internationalization of higher education, intercultural aspects, and leadership and change management. Furthermore, her research interests lie in international mobility, study destination choices and internationalisation of the curriculum. Monika has published her research internationally and in the UK. She has been an Editor for a selection of academic journals.

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- *Planet – Environment, Climate, Technology*
- *Profits – Economic structures; Business practices; Corporate social responsibility.*

This Call for Papers is open to all UG, PG and doctorate students and all staff; the papers can be from staff with students, staff with staff or students only. We invite all submissions meeting the submission guidelines (see below) deadline for submissions is **28 October 2021**. Each paper will be peer-reviewed by two members of the Editorial Board. Send papers to paul-alan.armstrong@sunderland.ac.uk

Submission Guidelines:

- Papers to be 3000 to 5000 words (please note: any papers over 5000 words will not be considered)
- Referenced using Harvard Style of Referencing
- 1.5 spacing, ariel size 11
- The structure of the paper to be:
    - ✓ Abstract (including keywords);
    - ✓ Introduction;
    - ✓ Literature Review;
    - ✓ Method/Methodology;
    - ✓ Findings and Discussion;
    - ✓ Conclusion;
    - ✓ References.

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Send papers to paul-alan.armstrong@sunderland.ac.uk

It is proposed the Working Paper Series in 2021-22, issue one will be published in the ***January of 2022.***

If you have any questions, please contact the editors of Business Educator:

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Appendix 1

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